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FANTASY FICTION

EDITED BY H. L. GOLD

SEPTEMBER
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September, 1954 Vol. 2, No. 2

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Cover by: KRUSZ

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H. L. GOLD, Editor EVELYN PAIGE, Managing Editor SAM MERWIN, JR., Associate Editor
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BEYOND Fantasy Fiction is published bi-monthly by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Main offices: 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y. 35c per copy. Subscriptions: (6 copies) \$2.00 in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions. Elsewhere \$2.50. Entry as second-class matter applied for at New York post office. Copyright 1954, by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. All rights, including translation, reserved. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction, and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A. by the Guinn Co., Inc. Title Reg. appl'd for U. S. Pat. Off.

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The Beautiful Brew

Illustrated by FRANCIS

By JAMES E. GUNN

*The barley nymph in Blitz's beer
should've made every drinker cheer
—instead, she was a hex on sales!*

THE head on the schooner of beer was a beauty. The rest was even lovelier. Doris passed Jerry Blitz with the empty

tray. She was small, dark, and plain.

Jerry put a hand on her arm. "Have you heard from Dion?"



She shook her head, glanced around the long, dark, mirrorlike table to see that each board member had an unlabeled bottle at his elbow, then left the room.

Jerry sighed and looked back at the schooner in front of him.

It was the essence of beer captured in a glass. The hucksters, for once, couldn't possibly oversell it. The clear, pale yellow had a sparkling brilliance; tiny bubbles streamed delicately to the top. On the sweating glass, the moisture collected in beads and trickled down the sides in rivulets.

Jerry could visualize it on color television. The one word BLITZ would be above it—below, FIRST FOR THIRST. The letters would be hollow like neon tubing; the tubing would be filled with the gently bubbling beer.

Jerry shuddered. It would be a sensation. But how many viewers would want to drink?

SOMETHING had piled the foam high in the center of the schooner and sculptured it into the shape of a girl. She began at the waist, a perfect, three-inch replica, her arms raised, her hands smoothing long, foam hair. Jerry thought it was the most gracious thing a girl could do.

The girl preened herself for Jerry. He looked at the unchanged faces around the table. Couldn't the others see it? Gently he rotated

the glass. Slowly the girl floated around to face Jerry.

But they *had* seen it. Baldwin was an old man—he made a dry noise swallowing. His face was a mask. He had many of them—he must have spent a lifetime perfecting them. Mask—Interested Audience. Mask—Solid Businessman. Mask—Staunch Friend. This time the mask was—Hardheaded Materialist.

Where was the real Arthur Baldwin? Where was the man who roared with laughter and moaned with passion and cried real tears? Had he been lost somewhere among the masks? Would a want ad help? LOST—one real person. Last seen wearing mask. Earnest Young Executive. Answers to name of Art . . .

There was no *art* left—it was all artifice. Jerry looked slowly around the table. Reeves, Williford, Woodbury, Alberg—of them all, only Bill Alberg acted as if he had noticed the foam-girl on the schooner. He was taking great pains not to look at her. But he was young—he had a lot to learn.

It was a typical board meeting. Reeves was taking notes. Baldwin was talking. There seemed to be a tacit conspiracy not to mention the girl. They spoke about the “unusual head” or the “foam action.” They denied that there was anything wonderful in the room with them.

What had happened to them? Had they no capacity left for wonder. All was reason—all was motive. Nothing in their lives was done just for fun.

What business did they have here? They should be directors of a railroad, not a brewery. A brewery is a place of tradition, of magic. It is a fantastic kitchen, mixing, cooking, aging. The essential ingredients were beyond absolute control. There was no use asking for precision.

A board meeting is a machine to grind out dollars. It is as stylized as a minuet. It has as much relationship to brewing as a guided tour through the brewery . . .

The fifth floor—the mill room. Stacked burlap bags of the slim, gray-husked malted barley and the fine, light-yellow gravel that is corn grits. Odor—a grain elevator or a hayloft. Following the ingredients as gravity takes them from floor to floor, from process to process; The malt is ground in this mill into a coarse flour and measured in these gins—about sixty per cent malt to forty per cent corn grits. How could you impart the mystery that malting is, the germinating of the grain that develops the vital enzymes?

"If this is a characteristic," Baldwin was saying in his dry, measured voice, "as it seems to be, the question is: how much of this beer do we have?"

"Thirty tanks in the finishing cellar," Jerry said. "That's 19,800 barrels." *Dion! Dion! Where are you?*

"My—! This is more serious than I thought," Baldwin exclaimed.

SERIOUS? *Brewing is always serious. Exactly how much malt? How much adjunct? How much water? At what temperature shall I dough in the mash? How hot shall I keep it for how long? The catalytic enzymes must have a chance to do their jobs. They must work on the starch, bring it into solution, change it into sugar . . . On the fourth floor is the adjunct cooker—where the corn grits are gelatinized—and the mash tub where it is joined with the malt. The heating is done with steam—the double-boiler principle. Tell them. Tell them that beer is ninety-one per cent water, that much of the difference in beers is due to the presence of minute amounts of hardening chemicals. See if they understand . . .*

"Catalysts," Jerry said. Baldwin stopped talking and frowned at Jerry.

"Sorry," Jerry said. "I was thinking."

"I'm asking," Baldwin said frigidly, "for a vote of disapproval on management."

"Wait a minute," Jerry said. "You can't judge a beer by just

looking at it. The taste is—"

"That won't be necessary," Baldwin said, glancing quickly at the glass in front of Jerry and away. "I—er—don't drink beer. And the appearance alone convinces me that the brew is unsalable."

Dost thou think, because thou are virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale? Jerry thought impassively. "This is once you'll have to compromise your principles," he said firmly. "You can't expect to direct a brewery without knowing something about its product. Beside each of you is an open bottle and a glass. If you pour it carefully, no head will be formed."

Reluctantly, cautiously, Baldwin tilted a little into a glistening goblet. He lifted it, sniffed at it, his long nose trying to draw away, and let a few drops pass under a curling upper lip. His eyes opened. He sipped again, drained the rest of the bottle into the glass, and poured it from the glass down his throat. A beautiful expression spread over his tanned, old face. "This is beer?" he asked in a startled voice.

"This," Alberg said excitedly, "is beer only in the sense that champagne is wine. This is *it*. This is what brewers have dreamed about for centuries—ever since the first Babylonian baker fermented his first accidental brew. No, this

isn't beer—this is nectar!"

Jerry sat back, surprised. He hadn't expected help from Bill. But Bill was promotion manager—maybe it was an automatic reaction.

Something flickered across Baldwin's face. It was gone before Jerry could identify it. It couldn't, he knew, be anything as straightforward and uncomplicated as greed.

"What a shame," Baldwin said ruefully, "that the quality of the head should keep it from the market."

One man's misfortune is another man's fortune. Jerry knew what Baldwin meant. For the first time in a hundred years, the brewery would be without a Blitz.

"Many a flaw," Jerry insisted, "has been turned into a virtue. We can look on this characteristic not as a drawback but as a distinction. Why not make the most of it?"

EVERY business has a language of its own. The language of brewing is German—*lauter, sparge, pfaff, wort . . .* The filtered mash as it comes from the *lauter tub* through the *pfaff* is called the *wort*. Hot water is sparged through the deep bed of husks and spent grains to wash out any extractives remaining. The *wort* is boiled in the gleaming, copper brew kettle, steam vented through the roof by

the curving copper chimney.

Jerry loved to stand by the lauter tub and look down over the railing at the brew kettle. Sometimes, he would see the wort boil through the sliding doors onto the concrete floor . . .

"Fantastic!" Baldwin was protesting. "Impossible!"

"Advertising can work miracles," Jerry said doggedly. "It can make women wear sacks or sweaters. It can make men prefer blondes or beagles. It can put a nation on wheels and make the amount and shape of chromium around it more important than food. It can put this over. It can make people demand this kind of beer. Picture the campaign—BLITZ—THE BEER WITH THE BEAUTIFUL HEAD!"

"By God!" Alberg exclaimed. "I think it could be done."

Baldwin snorted. "To put this beer on the market is to take dangerous risks with the firm name."

No, Baldwin wasn't the man to like risks. He had what he wanted—why should he let it get away? The puzzle was what he wanted with the brewery. Brewing is always a risk.

How much hops? When should the green-and-white flower be added? Guess—experiment! Put a couple of pounds in the brew kettle now to help clarify the wort. Half an hour later, add three pounds more to get the bitter hop

flavor. Just before the boiling ends, put in a final three pounds for the delicate and elusive hop aroma—and hope. Chance plays a big part. The wort might even spoil, although modern cooling methods had helped. It streamed like a foaming waterfall over ammonia-cooled pipes and was pumped up to the fermentation room . . .

"Alberg!" Baldwin said. Bill straightened up attentively. "I'll leave it to you. How is the beer-drinking public going to react to this—er—unusual formation of foam?"

"Well," Bill said hopefully, "it would be a novelty."

"A novelty," Baldwin said scornfully. "But the adult public doesn't want novelties in its food and drink. They won't touch this beer with a ten-foot straw. Eh, Alberg?"

"You're—probably right," Bill agreed reluctantly.

"We could include instructions," Jerry suggested desperately. "You know, pour gently! Save the sparkle! For the true flavor of beer, avoid a head—"

"You have delusions of grandeur," Baldwin cut in sharply. "We aren't Schlitz or Budweiser or Pabst. We can't afford a campaign of re-education."

DION! Dion! What was the reason for it, Dion? The water? The malt? The hops? Was it the

yeast? Had the mystery happened on the third floor in the chilled fermenting room? Two hundred twenty pounds of yeast, and all it took was one wild cell. Even though the strain was controlled by the laboratory, cultured from a single cell, it was a catalyst, changing the fermentable maltose sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide, and you could never really be sure of catalysts . . .

Jerry imagined a new strain of yeast working in the giant, metal-bound cypress tubs, fermenting a beer whose foam would be a naked girl. He looked back at the schooner. The foam had withered—the girl was sagging. Jerry glanced around the table at the busy faces and tipped a little beer from his bottle into the glass. When he looked at the schooner again, the girl was straight and proud.

She was a beautiful thing—viewed abstractly. The lines of the face were clean and young, the lips full and a little sensual, the arms slender and firm, the breasts high.

"Just suppose," Baldwin said sepulchrally, "that someone should accidentally get a head on his Blitz. Immediately—notoriety. Reporters would swarm around us like buzzards around carrion, picking us to pieces with their questions."

"The first maxim of promotion," Alberg said, "is to get the product mentioned."

"Some products can afford that kind of promotion," Baldwin said with distaste. "We can't. No food or drink can. There are three things it must be—pure, palatable and healthful. It must not be notorious." He turned back to Jerry. "Well, if the reporters did come, could you answer their questions?"

"No," Jerry said.

Dion! Why aren't you here? Why didn't you tell me this would happen and why? It couldn't have happened in the Ruh cellar where the green beer was aged. Maybe it was the finishing cellar. Maybe it was one of the last few ingredients—lupulin, salt, mellow malt, gum arabic. Gum arabic—a foam binder. That should be important. And the carbon dioxide returned to the beer in the carbonation tanks from the last stages of fermentation . . .

"Excuse me," Jerry said suddenly. "I'll be right back."

OUTSIDE the room, he leaned against the door and closed his eyes, a slender young man with a sensitive, dark face. His father would never have left his enemies alone to scheme behind his back, but he was not his father. Every moment was making that more apparent.

"Doris," he said weakly to the girl at the desk, "have you heard from Dion yet?"

"Not yet, Mr. Blitz," she said

worriedly. "He doesn't answer his telephone and the clerk says he hasn't seen him for a week."

"Keep trying," Jerry said. "I need him—badly. If he can't help me, the brewery is gone."

"Gone!" Doris echoed, startled. "What do you mean?"

"I thought you knew," Jerry said. "Baldwin loaned Dad the money to put out the new beer. Dad put up his shares in the brewery as security. What with expenses and inheritance taxes, I can't raise a dime. If Baldwin can discredit the new brew, he can claim the stock for nonpayment."

"But that will give him the majority interest!"

"That's right," Jerry said wearily. "Which means the brewery."

"Oh, dear!" Doris said. "You *do* need Dion. I've already tried the hospitals, the morgue, the police stations—"

"Have you tried the bars?" Jerry asked.

She shook her head in surprise.

"He's my last chance," Jerry groaned. "If he knew about the head on his brew, he might be able to fix it. He's got to be somewhere." Then Jerry turned and went back into the board conference room.

"**B**y the way," Baldwin said, turning around to look curiously at Jerry, "where is that new brewmaster of yours?"

Jerry's heart dipped into his stomach. "Dion?" he said. "He's—on vacation."

Baldwin's bland expression told Jerry that the evasion was transparent. Baldwin obviously knew that Dion was gone and how long he had been gone.

"But he's only been with the company a couple of months." Baldwin pretended amazement. "You say he's on vacation already?"

"That's what I said."

"Hm-m-m," Baldwin mused. "An unusual fellow—in many ways, I hear. Would you mind telling us where you got him? And why you fired your father's brewmaster? After his forty years experience."

"Gerhardt wasn't fired," Jerry said quickly. "He was retired on full pension. My father left instructions to hire Dion to fill Gerhardt's place."

"Your father also left some heavy debts," Baldwin said drily. "Well, since we can't have Dion's expert opinion, we must turn to someone else."

He stood up, a small, straight reed of a man, and walked slowly to the door. Jerry sighed and looked down at his schooner. The foam had finally collapsed.

The door opened. Behind Baldwin was a portly, white-haired man. Jerry stared with surprise at the round red, German face. "Gerhardt!"

"Mr. Jerry," said the old brewmaster. He had a trace of an accent.

"I don't understand," Jerry said in bewilderment. "What are you doing here?"

"This retirement," Gerhardt said heavily. "I am not happy doing nothing. 'Get out,' my wife says, 'I don't want you under my feet all day.' When Mr. Baldwin says that I might work again, I like that. I am here to help."

To help, Jerry thought. To help whom?

"I've asked for Mr. Gerhardt's help," Baldwin said. He looked around the table at the empty bottles. "We'll need more samples."

"Also the brew sheets," Gerhardt said.

Jerry sighed and nodded. "I'll have the chief chemist bring them up." He flicked the intercom switch and told Doris to call George Fennell.

THE chemist arrived with a sweating bottle in one hand, held at a respectful distance from his body, and a large, black notebook in the other. Fennell had a long, thin body and a face to match. "Gerhardt!" he said.

"Well, George, how is the brewing?" Gerhardt asked.

"Not so good," Fennell said sadly.

Jerry took the bottle from Fennell's limp hand, uncapped it, and

decanted it carefully into a tilted glass. The foam only flecked the top of the beer.

Gerhardt stared curiously at Jerry as he took the glass. He held it up to the light. "Good color," he said. "Brilliant. But what is the matter with the head?"

"Taste it," Jerry urged.

Gerhardt shrugged and tilted the glass judiciously to his lips. When he lowered it, his small, blue eyes were blinking. "Ah!" he said, with a partial, palatal stop that almost made it *ach!* His eyes opened wide. "Dot is perfect beer! Let me see the sheet."

After the long centuries of trial and error, of dreaming and experimentation, the perfect beer. Just the right blending of all the ingredients added in just the right quantities at just the right instants. The ideal alcohol content balanced against the carbohydrates, the protein, the mineral traces, and the carbonation. Color, aroma, flavor, sparkle, foam . . .

But it wasn't the perfect beer, of course. Not with a head like that.

Gerhardt looked up from the brew sheet, blinking blindly. "This I do not understand. These things are most unusual. The alcohol, now. It is 3.63; I would have thought it much higher."

"I understood this was five per cent beer," Baldwin said suspiciously.

"It is," Jerry explained. "Anything less than five and more than three point two is called five per cent."

"The chemical analysis," Fennell said suddenly, "is the only thing I can guarantee."

"What does that mean?" Baldwin said, turning toward the chemist.

Fennell shrugged maliciously. "Dion didn't care for paper work. He refused to be bothered with it. I told him that there might be variations to check back on, but he laughed. 'The brew' he said, 'will be perfect.' When I insisted, he told me to please myself. 'Put down anything that will make you happy,' he said. 'It is a small thing.' "

"You let him get away with that?" Baldwin exclaimed.

"You do not understand," Gerhardt said scornfully. "The brewmaster, he is the absolute boss."

First Bill, Jerry thought, then Gerhardt and now George. Is there anyone who will not desert me? Oh, Dion, old friend, why have you deserted me, too? Dion! Is your name short for Dionysus? It would be a good name for a brewer, old vintner, old bull, old goat, old corn god, tree god, vine god. What should a Bacchus do today but brew? Oh, Dion, where are you?

"Then the brew can't be duplicated," Baldwin was saying sharp-

ly. "Even if the head could be—er—amputated, you couldn't be sure you would get the same brew."

"Dion can do it," Jerry pointed out. "He did it thirty times in a row."

"Ah," Baldwin said, "but he isn't here now. And who knows when he will return? It seems to me that this is poor management!"

FROM around the table came a murmur of approval.

Jerry bit his lip. "This 'poor management' brought out the best beer ever brewed," he said.

"And it can't be sold. Perhaps it can't even be brewed again." Baldwin turned to Gerhardt. "What is your opinion?"

Gerhardt's head was swinging back and forth between Jerry and Baldwin. "It is hard to say," he said in bewilderment. "Brewing is not a science. It is an art. Strange things happen during the malting, the mashing, the boiling, the fermenting—"

"Beer," Fennell broke in, "is a delicate blend of a number of ingredients, which must be added in the proper quantities at the proper time and at the exact temperature. Organic catalysts play the biggest part, and their actions aren't completely understood. Minute variations in temperatures and timing as well as in quality make

a big difference in the final product."

"I'm afraid I don't follow—" Baldwin began.

"Well," Fennell said patiently, "the distinctive flavor of Scotch whisky, for instance, is due to peat smoke absorbed by the barley during the kilning part of the malting process."

"Let's get back to beer," Baldwin said. "The distinctive quality of our new beer is *this!*" He picked up the half-full bottle and emptied it into Gerhardt's glass.

The beer gurgled creamily out of the bottle and foamed up in the glass. Out of the foam climbed the naked girl. This time she was stretching. Her hands were clasped behind her back, her arms drawn straight and tight, her shoulders pulled back. She stared at Jerry with blind foam eyes.

"Ach!" Gerhardt exclaimed. "Dot's a head!"

The bubbles moved the figure gently. The foam-girl almost seemed alive.

"What," Baldwin asked huskily, "is the reason for that?"

Gerhardt shook himself. "There could many reasons be," he said uneasily. "The kind of malt, the mashing temperatures—but it is the yeast! Yah! Whenever I have trouble with the brew, always it is the yeast!"

"What do you think?" Baldwin swung around to face Fennell.

"The yeast is the same pure strain we've used for years," Fennell said. He started at the figure on top of the foam and licked his lips. "I insist that it's the carbonation and the gum arabic. Somehow they've combined to produce this."

"Nonsense," Jerry said firmly. "You've tested it a dozen times. The carbonation is 2.42 on the nose and the gum arabic is exactly the same. You're both wrong. It's—"

"What?" Baldwin asked. "It's a perfectly natural phenomenon with a perfectly natural explanation. Isn't it?"

"Yes," Jerry said weakly. "Yes. Dion will know."

The paneled door flew open. A man in white coveralls stood in the doorway.

"Mr. Blitz!" he shouted. "Come quick! There's hell to pay in the racking room!"

AFTER they passed through the chill of the finishing cellar, the racking room was warm, but the workmen were frozen in their places. It was a big room, stacked neatly with aluminum barrels. One of the barrels stood on end near the racking machine in the center. A patent spigot had been forced through the cork stopper. Quart-sized metal mugs, foaming with beer, sat on a barrel beside the racking machine.

From an overhead drum, four



rigid tubes extended downward. Ordinarily there would be a barrel under each of them. They would be on their sides, bungholes pointing toward the ceiling. One would be starting to fill. One would be half full. One would be full and foaming, the tube swiveled back out of the way while a beerbellied, strong-armed laborer slipped a wooden bung into the hole and hammered it flat with a huge, hard-rubber mallet. Other workmen would be rolling away the fourth barrel and rolling in an empty barrel to take its place.

But the work had stopped. Four barrels were full. The tubes had swiveled back. Foam was pouring out of the barrels. And, dancing seductively on the barrels like a naked chorus line were four two-foot-high foam-maidens, completely formed down to the ankles.

The men were staring at them with wide, stricken eyes, unable to move.

JERRY swung toward the foreman. "Who told you to rack the new brew?"

"Nobody, sir," he said, licking his lips nervously, "but that's all we have left."

Jerry was already moving down the line of barrels that were in the racking machine. As he approached, the girls seemed to sway sentiently toward him. He ignored them. He picked up the mallet,

slipped a bung into a barrel and hammered it down. Four strokes and the job was done. Jerry sighed and wistfully watched the foam creatures melt away.

"That's all," he said. "We won't be racking any more beer until further notice."

"You bet we won't," one of the laborers said angrily. "I quit."

He stalked away. The other workmen followed him. The foreman turned to Jerry. "You know what that means? They'll all walk out!"

"I know," Jerry said heavily and walked slowly to the elevator.

As he stepped back into the conference room, Baldwin was reaching for the door handle on the other side.

"Oh!" he said, a little startled. "I'm glad you're here. We've just taken a vote. If you can't eliminate the objectionable head from the new brew, we'll have to dump it. And that, of course, will mean a change in management."

Jerry nodded. "How long?"

Baldwin didn't try to misunderstand. "Every minute wasted is money lost. We must get back into salable production. You have until tomorrow morning."

They filed past him, not looking into his face — Baldwin, Reeves, Williford, Woodbury, Alberg . . .

Bill stopped and drew Jerry aside. "Look, Jerry," he muttered, "I'm sorry about—"

"Forget it," Jerry said.

"No, listen! When Baldwin asked me about the promotion possibilities, I mean— well, I could have held out—"

"Forget it, I said," Jerry told him coolly. "You've got a job to look after."

WHEN they were gone, the room seemed strangely silent. Jerry stood in the doorway and looked at Doris. "How about you? Aren't you leaving?"

"No, sir," she said. "Not until I'm fired."

Slowly, Jerry relaxed. At least one person was faithful. Two persons—there was Joan. "Did you get in touch with Dion?"

She shook her head despondently. "No, sir, but I talked to a couple of bartenders who knew him. I left word with them to call you if he showed up."

"So he is a drinker, eh?"

"Oh, he drinks, all right. But the bartenders said they'd never seen him drunk. They seemed to think there was something remarkable about it."

"Maybe because he drinks so much," Jerry said bitterly. "Dammit! I liked that man!"

"I don't understand how you came to hire him without learning more about him."

"My father hired him—just before he died. That was the first time I met Dion. He and Dad

seemed to be good friends. They were laughing and drinking together. Dad wasn't feeling too well, even then, but Dion gave him a lift.

"Dad was sipping an unlabeled bottle of beer. He slammed his fist down on the table and said, 'By all the gods, I'll *do* it!' Then he turned to me and said, 'If anything happens to me, *you* do it! A man should leave something behind him besides money!'

"Do what?" I asked.

"Hire Dion as our new brewmaster! He's going to brew us the best damned beer this country has ever seen!"

Jerry was silent, remembering.

Doris said, "And he did, too."

"Yes, he did," Jerry sighed. "And Dad didn't live to taste it. Dion worked hard. I don't think he left the brewery for weeks. He handled everything himself, from doughing-in to pitching the wort with yeast. And then, all at once, he got restless. I haven't seen him since."

"A strange man," Doris said reflectively. "But I'm sure he had some good reason."

"Maybe," Jerry said wearily. "It better be. It's ruined me."

"That woman must have known," Doris said suddenly.

"What woman?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Blitz," she said hastily. "I mean Miss Blessing. Your fiancée. She was here a little

while ago. She left this."

Doris opened the wide desk drawer and picked up a ring. She dropped it into Jerry's hand.

He looked at it dazedly. "Joan?" he said.

"Now don't be upset," Doris said maternally. "She isn't worth it. She was only interested in your money. She said she never could stand the name Blitz. Now, the first time you hit trouble—boom! You ought to get some nice girl," she added impulsively. "Someone who'd be interested in you just for yourself."

"Okay," Jerry muttered. "How about you, Doris? Do *you* like the name Blitz?"

"I think it's a fine . . ." she began and stopped. "That is—I mean—I'm engaged, Mr. Blitz."

She held out her left hand. The diamond in the ring was a tiny flame.

"Sure," Jerry said. "Congratulations." He tossed the ring in his hand and slipped it carelessly into a pocket. "I'm going up to the penthouse. Have all bottles of the new brew sent up there."

His shoulders straightened. He walked purposefully toward the door. He had lost his illusions. He had lost his girl. Within a few hours, he would lose his brewery.

It was the best beer ever brewed.

He might as well make the most of it.

EXCEPT for a lighted path between the living room and the kitchen, the penthouse was dark. In the living room, was a coffee table. On it was a full schooner of beer. Some of the liquid had spilled over the edge—had made dark stains on the leather. Atop the schooner, was a lovely head and a lovelier bosom.

Jerry leaned over the coffee table and held up his glass to the girl. She had her head cocked.

**"Oh, many a peer of England brews
Livelier liquor than the Muse,
And malt does more than Milton
can**

To justify God's way to Man."

Jerry paused and nodded owlishly at the foam-girl. He sipped his beer.

**"Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink
For fellows whom it hurts to think."**

From deep down, Jerry brought up a resounding belch. A pleased smile spread over his face. "The perfect beer!" he said, wagging a finger. "What'd beer be without it? Eh? Ale, now. Ol' Housman talks 'bout ale, an' he prob'ly didn't know first thing 'bout it. First thing 'bout ale is it's top fermented; lagers're bottom fermented."

He sipped again. "Beer," he said, "is best served at temp'ature 'tween forty-two and forty-five degrees Fahr'nheit. Foam's best, vol'tile gases 'scape, an' del'cate 'roma an' pleasing flavor of beer're preserved."

The girl's head tilted a little farther.

"'Nother words," Jerry said, "this beer's too hot an' you're looking droopy. Here!" He emptied his glass into the schooner. It ran over onto the table foamily and dripped onto the thick rug. The girl straightened up.

"'S better," he said. With exaggerated care, he got up and maneuvered around the table. Once free of it, he rolled toward the kitchen as if his feet were several inches off the floor. When he came back, he had two cold, unlabeled bottles in his hand. He set them down on the table and carefully flipped the cap from one of them with an ivory-handled opener.

Gently, he tipped the beer into his glass and set the bottle alongside a number of others on the floor.

He blinked at them and began to count, lost track, and started over. "Thirteen," he said finally. "'Tastic! Each one's 'quivalent ounce of whisky. 'M out on feet an' don't know it."

THE girl seemed to nod in agreement.

"Nope!" Jerry said, shaking his head vigorously. "Three stages to drunk'ness, somebody said — bell-'cose, lach'r'mose, com'tose. Skipped 'em all. Stands to reason. 'S perfect beer. I feel wonderful."

The girl nodded happily.

"'Meuphoric," Jerry said triumphantly. "Who cares 'bout future?" He tried to snap his fingers. "Why," he asked indignantly, "should anyone 'ject to you on his beer? Most d'lightful drinking 'panion man ever had. Dec'rative, 'preciative an' silent. What more can any man ask of any woman? What more can any man ask of beer? Eh?"

He began to wave his glass back and forth in time to the rhythm of a poem.

"If all be true that I do think

There are five reasons we should drink—"

He broke off. A man was standing in the open doorway. Jerry just stared at him.

"Good beer—a friend—or being dry—

Or lest we should be by and by—
Or any other reason why."

The man had finished the quotation. "And I hope Dr. Aldrich will forgive the paraphrase."

"*Dion!*" Jerry exclaimed.

The man in the doorway was a little less than medium height. He had medium brown hair and undistinguished features. In compensation, his clothes were a blaze of individuality.

His tie was purple, his shirt yellow, his coat a royal blue; his slacks were Kelly green, his socks scarlet, his shoes white buck. He was a walking prism. But even his clothes paled beside his expression:

it was a joyful defiance of everything held sacred and a sacred delight in everything found joyful. It surrounded him like an aura.

He's euphoric, Jerry thought, like the beer.

Dion looked ageless. Sometimes, like tonight, he seemed younger than the greenest brew pumped from the fermenting tubs to the Ruh cellar. At other times, he seemed centuries older than the brewery itself.

"You've tapped the new brew," he said, and his voice was vibrant with life to be lived. He looked down at the foamy schooner. "Nymphs and satyrs! What's this?"

"This," Jerry said gloomily, in a perverse reaction to Dion's presence, "is my ruin."

"Ruin is so final," Dion said gayly. "Many a girl has found it to be only a gateway to a fuller life. Well, let us consider the matter." He sat down on the edge of a deep chair and studied the figure in the foam. "Lovely—exquisite! How is the beer?"

"S perfect," Jerry said, his unnatural melancholy lifting a little.

"Naturally," Dion said, nodding. "But this creature complicates the sales, is that it?"

JERRY gravely outlined the situation. "Where were you when I needed you?" he ended on a plaintive note.

"Tending to some necessities. Pleasant, true, but necessities for all of that. Just as you are now. Pretty well under, aren't you?"

"Under the table?" Jerry said with great dignity. "Of course not. Half seas over, yes. Also—fuddled, lush, mellow, merry, plastered, primed, sozzled, squiffy, topheavy, tight, oiled and one over the eight. I am drunk as a piper, a fiddler, a lute, a lord, an owl, David's sow or a wheelbarrow. I feel fine. But where were you when I needed you?"

"Old Baldwin was cleverer than you thought. He had a party going night and day for a week, but the girls and the liquor were exhausted before I was. And here I am. Unless we exorcise this creature, you lose the brewery. I can't let that happen. Did anyone have an explanation of the phenomenon?"

Jerry chuckled reminiscently. "Gerhardt said it must the yeast be. Fennell said it was a combination of carbon dioxide and gum 'rabic."

"The infidels!" Dion breathed. "The joyless, materialistic infidels! Always the direct cause. Always! Never the catalyst. They're brewers. *They* should understand catalysts. But they don't. Nobody does. This is a sad, sad age. It hasn't even recognized the most important catalyst of all."

Jerry frowned. "What's that?"

"Man," Dion said breathlessly,

spreading his hands. "You know the definition of a catalyst—a substance which accelerates a reaction but is itself unchanged. Isn't that Man?"

"'S truth!" Jerry agreed solemnly.

"Man gets glimpses of reality," Dion said mournfully, "but does not piece them together. Of course, many can never see direct evidence of his catalytic action. What catalyst can?"

"Men have the truth in their hands, and they can't see it. They talk about luck and premonitions, talents and green thumbs. If Man ever applied himself to the study of his own catalytic action, he'd become a god. That, after all, was the secret of the gods."

"'S truth?" Jerry asked, open-mouthed.

Dion nodded, sighing. "But Man calls it superstition. The ancients knew better. They knew the obvious—a brewer is more important than his materials. Why is it that the beer you brew isn't half as good as that of the medieval monasteries?"

"I give up," Jerry said breathlessly.

"You control everything except the brewer. The old wisdom has been lost. A brewer impresses his own personality on the beer. He must, first of all, be continent during the brewing."

"Continent?" Jeff echoed.

"North America, Europe, Asia?"

"Arctic," Dion said. "Absolutely. You can imagine the strain."

"Certainly," Jerry agreed.

"By the time I finished the brewing, my unnatural existence had fermented me into a frenzy. I had to seek release or burst!"

Jerry thought of Dion exploding like a bottle hot with carbonation. The vision was too much for him. He buried his face in the glass and drained it.

WHEN he looked up again, Dion had opened the other beer and was sampling it out of the bottle. "Ah!" he said appreciatively. "A true daughter of the malt. The world must have it."

"Forget it!" Jerry said with an airy wave of his hand. "Drink and be merry."

"And tomorrow lose the brewery?" Dion said horrified. "No, no! For then this beer would be lost to the world, and I would lose my job. Even a catalyst must eat. Now! I find this head quite attractive, but where did it come from and how can we get rid of it?"

"'Cisely!" Jerry exclaimed. "Logic is 'peccable.'"

"Flattery," Dion said sheepishly. "Matter of fact, my reasoning is all intuitive. But let's go on. The catalytic process is, by its nature, basically uncontrollable. The immaterial approach opens the gate for other immaterial aspects."

"Spirits!" Jerry said suddenly.

"Wonderful!" Dion said, clapping his hands together exuberantly. "You understand. We have, in our beer, spirits of alcohol in a more literal translation. Our brew has become possessed; we must exorcise it."

"To possess the brew, we must dispossess the spirit!" Jerry exclaimed triumphantly.

"That's the spirit!" Dion applauded.

"We must denature the spirit without denaturing the alcohol!"

Jerry did a few wild dance steps around the room. He came to a sudden stop. "How?" he said.

"The question, exactly," Dion agreed.

"Garlic — mistletoe — wolfsbane — silver bullets — holy water — crucifixes?"

"No, *no!*" Dion protested. "Rank superstition. Worthless."

"Well?"

"The girl is facing you now that you're standing up. She was facing you when you were sitting over there. Which way does she usually face?"

"That's a funny thing," Jerry said thoughtfully. "Toward me—always. You'd think she'd face some other direction occasionally."

"Where there is a persistence of phenomena, there is a reason. Why does she face toward you?"

"I give up."

"You. You're the reason!"

JERRY shook his head. "I'm too happy to be a reason. I'd much rather be an excuse or a rationalization."

"I may have been the gate," Dion said, "but you were the goal. This spirit wants to look at you."

"At *me*?" Jerry exclaimed. "Incredible!"

"Spirits are moved only by strong emotions," Dion warned.

"And emotions," Jerry added solemnly, "are moved only by strong spirits."

"Love and hate," Dion said. "You've done nothing to be hated for. It must be love."

"Ah!" Jerry said sinking down into a chair. "*Love*. It is something to be loved, if only by a spirit. What do I do? Tell it to go away?"

"We must be careful," Dion said cautiously. "Spirits are simple things. And love is mother to hate."

"Love has already ruined me," Jerry groaned. "What would hate do?"

"So," Dion ignored Jerry's question, "we must lure her out."

"Like a fish?"

"Very like."

"What'll we use for a lure?"

"The best lure for what we want to hook. *You!*"

"I've always wondered what a minnow feels like," Jerry said.

"But," Dion said, "where do we cast you?"

Jerry snapped his fingers. He looked up. "Come on!" He dashed through the front door with Dion close behind him. The elevator was standing open.

As the elevator started down, Dion said, "Ah! The finishing cellar!"

"That," Jerry said, "will be only the beginning."

The door slid open. They walked quickly down a long corridor. Jerry felt light-headed. He opened a heavy door. Cold air hit them. The temperature was close to freezing. Jerry flicked on the overhead lights.

The room was filled with long, horizontal tanks. White frost was piled up under them in chunks. Jerry led the way between the tanks and through another heavy door into the racking room.

"Here," Jerry said, kicking one of the barrels in the racking machine, "is a keg of the new brew." He pulled the spigot out of the upright keg. It was old beer—the foam was ordinary foam. "Here," he said, "is a spigot."

Dion had set one of the barrels on end. Jerry pushed the end of the spigot through the cork stopper and down into the barrel. "Now," he said, "let's dash our spirit."

HE turned the tap on full. The beer streamed onto the floor in a white torrent, hit, splashed,

foamed. The pungent, hoppy odor of beer made the air thick. On yellow pools formed thick, creamy blankets of foam. In the middle of the pools, the foam mounted high. It shaped itself. It became human. It became feminine. It became the girl. Her hands were outstretched.

She grew. She was a foot high. Two feet—three. When she was over five feet tall, Jerry hastily slammed the tap shut. She grew a few more inches and stopped. For the first time, Jerry saw her complete—beautiful and perfect.

She seemed almost alive. She was a work of art, done with that loving care that can make cold marble seem warm. The foam stirred gently as if she breathed. She swayed as if she would like to walk.

Jerry turned to Dion. "Now what?"

Dion shrugged helplessly. "Let your instincts guide you."

Hesitantly, Jerry held out a hand and touched the foam. The girl stirred. Jerry jerked back his fingers and rubbed them together. His face crinkled up. "That felt—strange," he said.

He took a deep breath and reached out again.

This time a foam hand seemed to reach out to meet his hand. He jerked it back. The foam came with him; the girl came with the foam, stepped out of the yellow pool as if she had legs, standing



on the pavement as if she had feet. Her creamy chest rose and fell. Her eyes opened. They were deep blue, like a summer sky mirrored in a mountain pool.

"Venus," Dion murmured, "rising from the foam."

Jerry pulled his hand away. "That's not foam," he said weakly. "That's skin. It's warm!"

"That," Dion said softly, "is the power of love."

The girl opened her mouth. "Love," she said. It was, appropriately, her first word. Her hair was long and blonde, tumbling around her shoulders. Her skin was creamy white.

Her eyes followed Jerry adoringly. "I've loved you for so long."

"How long?" Dion asked interestedly.

"Ever since I came here with the barley," she said, aware of Dion for the first time. "I was the Barley-Bride. You know, the last barley cut in the field."

"Ah!" Dion said wisely. "I see. But you have made a great deal of trouble, you know."

Her eyes widened. "Have I? For Jerry? Oh," she said passionately, "I could kill myself. But it was the only way I could make Jerry aware of me."

"You did," Jerry muttered. "Oh, baby, you did!"

"Everybody was so mean to Jerry," the girl said, her eyes blazing like pellets of potassium drop-

ped into water. "Especially that Joan creature."

Joan! The thought of her was like ice-water. Jerry took a quick sharp breath. "If you don't mind," he said with sudden clarity, "I think I'll be going."

"I don't mind," she said, stepping forward eagerly to stand beside him. "Where shall we go?"

"*We?*" he said in alarm. "You don't understand! I want to be alone."

"That sounds like fun," she agreed happily. "Let's do it."

JERRY said very flatly, "I want to be alone—all by myself!"

"How dull!" she said, pouting. "And it's not fair. You lured me into this world. It's only right that you take care of me. Then we'll belong to each other."

"Oh, no!" Jerry protested. First, Joan had wanted to own him—now this foam-girl. It was too much! "I don't want to belong to anybody."

He left quickly, back through the heavy door into the finishing cellar, between the long carbonating tanks, and through the doorway into the corridor.

"But I belong to you!" he heard her cry behind him.

Jerry glanced back. She was following him, moving lightly and swiftly. He felt the touch of fear. As a tiny, inanimate figure of foam, she had been appealing. As

a live girl born of beer, she was—impossible—frightening.

Jerry sprinted up the concrete steps to the second floor. The copper brew kettle gleamed dully in the darkness like a wet, shiny brontosaurus raising its long neck out of a Jurassic swamp. Jerry hesitated beside the brewmaster's office, but two sides of it were windows. The girl was closer.

The third floor was only a balcony. Jerry looked longingly at the lautering tub. If he could slip through the man-sized opening and lower himself into the sheltering darkness, the foam nymph might pass by, unaware. But it would be a fatal trap, if she suspected. The laboratory had the same disadvantages as the brewmaster's office below it.

Jerry pulled open the heavy, insulated door to the fermentation room and dived in among the tall cypress tubs and the heavy odor of yeast.

He crouched behind a row of tubs, shivering in the thirty-six degree temperature. He heard the door open. *Maybe she won't know about the lights*, he thought.

"Jerry!" she called gaily. "Jerry!" she laughed. It was a beautiful and chilling sound, like youth and joy and triumph all melted together and poured into a bell. "Here I come!"

Good God! Jerry thought. *To her, it's just a game.* The room

stayed dark, but she moved confidently among the tubs. *She can see in the dark.*

Jerry shivered and cautiously tiptoed toward the door. When halfway there, he sneezed.

In the silent room, the sound was thunderous. The girl laughed in the distance and Jerry ran to the door, swearing under his breath. He slammed the door behind him, then dashed for the stairs leading to the fourth floor. Behind him, the fermenting room door opened and shut.

There was no place to hide except in the adjunct cooker or the mash tub. But now she was too close for anything like that. He turned the corner and raced up to the fifth floor. The burlap sacks of malted barley, corn grits and spent grains were stacked in neat piles. He ran between them, trying to reach the freight elevator.

But she caught him.

DION eventually found them.

And by that time, Jerry had discovered that there are other reasons for wanting a person besides possession.

"She'll need a name," Jerry said, "and a birth certificate. Oh, God! She'll need so many things."

"To love," Dion stated, "all things are possible."

"Love?" Jerry echoed. "Love?" He looked at her, wide-eyed. "Well, I'll . . .!" Suddenly, his

expression changed. "Don't you feel well?"

Her face was pale. "Why? What's the matter?"

"You seem to be sagging."

"I'm standing up straight."

"Then you're shrinking," Jerry exclaimed. "You're not five feet tall."

She looked up into his face. "You do seem bigger."

Jerry turned fiercely toward Dion. "Can't you do something?"

Dion spread his hands helplessly. "The gods give and the gods take away."

"No!" Jerry said violently. "I won't let it happen! I've just found her!"

A single tear ran down the girl's cheek. She brushed it away with a slender arm.

"There's no law saying she has to shrink away, is there?" demanded Jerry.

"No," Dion said.

"Then there's a reason for this. We're going to find it—fast! And when we find it, we're going to do something about it. She's shrinking. Why?"

"Loss of fluid?" Dion suggested. "After all, the human body is almost seventy per cent water."

"I'm thirsty," she said.

"The question is—does she have a human body?"

Dion glanced at her sideways. "So it would seem."

"But human bodies don't shrink.

Not so fast, anyway. Beer," Jerry said thoughtfully, "is ninety-one per cent water."

"I'm thirsty," the girl complained.

"That's it!" Jerry and Dion cried simultaneously.

"She's human," Jerry said excitedly, "but she still has some of the characteristics of foam. Unless I kept putting beer into the schooner, the head would dry up and disintegrate. Unless I keep putting beer in her, she'll shrink away to nothing!"

"I'm thirsty," she moaned.

JERRY looked at her quickly. She was only four feet tall. "We've got to hurry," he said. "Dammit! I drank up all the bottled beer, and she might not last to the racking room."

Faced by this practical problem, Dion anxiously asked, "Isn't there any more, anywhere?"

Jerry started for the door. "I've got it!"

He dived for the elevator and started it down. When he turned, Dion was beside him.

"Look, Jerry, old man," Dion said in a low, confidential voice. "Are you sure you want to save her? I know you're excited right now, but women are trouble, you know. And she isn't really human. Let her shrink away and all your problems are solved. You'll have the new beer without the head on

it, as beautiful a brew as this world ever saw. You'll have the brewery. You can have your pick of dozens of girls."

Jerry had been staring blankly at Dion. The jar of the elevator as it stopped seemed to jolt him awake.

"If I didn't know you better," he said, "I'd fire you for that."

He dashed toward the little pasteurizing tank. The water was steaming. Jerry dipped his hand into it and pulled out a bottle. He gasped at the pain and tossed the bottle back and forth between his hands, trying to cool it.

"But why?" Dion persisted. He was beside Jerry, holding out a bottle opener he had picked up in his office just around the corner.

"Why, just for fun," Jerry said, dashing up the stairs because the elevator was too slow. "Just because life wouldn't be any fun without her."

"That's fine," Dion said softly, slowing to a walk. "That's the best motive I've heard in centuries."

IT was a very happy ending.

The girl got the beer, of course. It was hot beer, but hot beer is better than no beer. She also got a birth certificate—forged—which proves that what is impossible to love is possible to money.

And then she got a name—Mrs. Gerald Blitz. It was enough. She seemed to be quite happy with it.

Jerry didn't get a hangover—it was, after all, the perfect beer. He did get a bride who was beautiful, unspoiled and single-minded. Although she had to be awakened three times a night for a cold bottle, no one ever heard him complain. And there can't be much wrong, basically, with a girl who loves beer. That problem was simplified, too, by the fact that he owned a brewery.

Dion kept his job as brewmaster and Jerry put up with his periodic absences. Although Dion never seemed to get drunk on these binges, everyone else did and had wonderful times. Jerry never asked if his name was short for Dionysus. He never hinted that he wouldn't be surprised if the god who gave wine to the Greeks should give beer to the world.

He was afraid he might get an answer.

Even the public was rewarded. It got to drink the perfect beer without being disconcerted by a lovely nymph made of foam. Although that—if it had only known—was the public's loss.

James E. Gunn

Earth Shaker

Siamese seismology plenty simple—

Little men, little quake . . .

Big fish, big quake.

Work plenty good, thank you!

By FRANKLIN GREGORY

EVERY afternoon, during those last busy days in Chieng Mai, the Shan monks in their yellow robes walked over from their monastery to see how we were coming along in setting up the seismographs. And every time they came, I noticed the change in Gon's manner. From the cheerful, betel-chewing youngster with the carefree manner, he became most respectful, dropping whatever he was doing to serve the old men tea and sweet cakes, or to answer their sober questions.

Only when he casually mentioned that he had received his early education from these same monks in the monastic school, did I understand his deference. In those regions, one forever venerates the teachers of his childhood.

I was really in luck to have Gon, or so I thought at the time. Not only was he a Shan himself, but he spoke passable English. He had a mechanic's deft hands. Moreover, until the Siamese Government assigned him to help me, he'd studied what passed for science at Chulalongkorn Univer-

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

sity down south in Bangkok.

When he first joined me, I tried my best to explain what we were doing. Ours was a Point Four project and, as professor of geophysics at New York Tech, I'd been given the job of seeing it through.

CHIENG Mai is on the Me Ping, a lovely, shallow river cupped between high, teak-forested mountains. With the approval of the Chao, the hereditary chief, I'd picked for my station an abandoned Buddhist temple on the river bank, just outside the town's massive, ancient walls and not far from the low, rambling monastery, which the Shans call *hopoongryi-kyuang*.

It was an ideal setup. The region is highly seismic and the strong foundations of the old temple provided the necessary stability for the delicate instruments. Yet the monks' daily visits got on my nerves. Their impure Buddhism is thickly coated with weird superstitions. I'd heard that they even practiced magic to acquire merit for their next reincarnation. They seldom smiled—indeed, they seemed to be perpetually glowering. On one of their final visits, I asked Gon if they disapproved of my taking over the old temple.

Gon hitched up his red sarong and spat a thin stream of crimson

betel juice on the marble flags.

"Ah, no, sir eminent Dr. Parker," he said finally. "Is okay. Spirits no more here. Spirits go new temple."

"Then why do they seem so confounded gloomy?" I demanded.

Gon's dark, oblique eyes narrowed.

"They say," he replied hesitantly, as if afraid to offend me, "that great machines no work."

"What do they mean—they won't work?"

Turning to the monks, Gon spoke in the curious, five-toned Shan language, which so few Occidentals have ever mastered. At last he reported. "They say, eminent sir, they will not make earthquakes. They say only great fish and little men make earthquakes."

"Good Lord!" I barked. "Tell those fools the seismographs aren't *supposed* to make earthquakes!"

Gon turned back to the monks, and again there was the sing-song of their palaver. Finally, he said softly, "Honorable monks respectfully ask eminent Dr. Parker, then what are machines supposed to do?"

I sighed, feeling that I couldn't be a very good teacher. Here Gon had been working with me for two months, and he didn't know the answer to that one.

"Tell them," I replied with what I hoped was a blend of patience and sarcasm, "the machines are

not *supposed* to do anything. They merely show where and when an earthquake occurs."

This time the confab between Gon and the monks became spirited. Then Gon reported, "They say that is very silly. They say they can tell where and when earthquake happen without such machines. They say they simply *feel* earthquake."

I GLANCED at the monks. I thought I detected a superior smile on the face of their leader. I sat down on a bench, lit my pipe stalling for time and tried to figure out an answer. Finally, I answered, "Tell them the machines record *distant* earthquakes—far-away earthquakes that they cannot feel right here in Chiang Mai."

Obediently, Gon told them. Then he translated for me—patiently as before—"Honorable monks ask—how can there be earthquake they cannot feel?"

That really puzzled me. Apparently, they had no sense of geographical dimensions beyond their own immediate world. I tried another tack.

"Tell the honorable monks," I said, "that the machines show how deep in the earth the earthquake starts."

There was the customary pause, with the monks again putting their heads together. And then Gon reported, "They say to eminent

Dr. Parker, they already know how deep earthquake are. They are where great fish and little men live, which is just under ground."

"Listen!" I sputtered. "What the devil is all this business about great fish and little men?"

"Oh, sir, you not know?" Gon asked in surprise. "Great fish—so monks say—sleep all curled up down there and sometime dream of big fight and bite own tail. Then pain wake great fish and great fish shake in anger and *great* earthquake happen."

I stared at him.

"Little men," Gon continued imperturbably, "get lonely down there and knock on roof to say hello, and that make *little* earthquake."

"Certainly *you* don't believe such superstition?"

Gon chewed his betel thoughtfully. "'Course not," he said. "Gon no believe any sup'stition." But I had a suspicion he intended only to mollify me.

OF course, it was mere coincidence that the earthquake happened just then. It was only a tremor, but through the arched doorway of the temple, I could see a small wave start at the river's edge and roll slowly across to the far shore.

Hitching up their habits, the monks scampered out in the courtyard and threw themselves face

down on the earth. Gon, after a frightened glance toward me, followed almost at once.

"We are here, we are here!" they shouted. And I knew they were telling their little friends not to feel lonely.

I walked to the doorway. "Gon!" I called sharply. "Come here!"

He got up and came reluctantly.

"I thought you were the boy who didn't believe in superstitions!" When he merely stood there, looking down at his feet, I added, "Gon, there are no little men down there. And no great fish, either. You must understand that!"

With paper and pencil, I drew—as I have countless times on blackboards for my classes in geodynamics—a rough sketch of the earth's strata. I showed how the pressure of crustal movements caused dislocations in the rocks, which we call faults. And then I showed that, as the faults grow, there is a great sliding along them that causes surface disturbance.

"And now," I asked, "do you understand?"

Gon's red-stained lips parted in a wide grin. He bobbed his head. "Yes, yes, Gon un'stand," he said. Then, squinting at the drawing and pointing to the line I had indicated as a fault, he inquired, "But what first begin all so much movement—little men or great fish?"

It couldn't be entirely hopeless. Could such basic beliefs ever be eradicated? Finally, I had an idea and suggested, "Gon, I think you need an education in the United States. I can get you an exchange scholarship. Would you like to study geology?"

The boy's eyes brightened. "Ah, eminent sir Dr. Parker, yes, yes," he said eagerly.

GON was in none of my own classes when he enrolled at Tech. They are for more advanced students. But I got regular reports from his professors and learned he was doing well, especially in Geology I. I was gratified to learn, too, that without advice from anyone, he'd signed up for the cartography course. Mapmaking is a great help to the geologist in the field.

But just as I was congratulating myself for bringing him here, the trouble over the betel nuts came up. Finding that he couldn't obtain them in New York, Gon wrote a friend in Bangkok to send him a supply. Since betel, like opium, is contraband, the shipment was seized and Gon, as the prospective recipient, was hauled down to the Customs House for questioning. It took most of two days for me to straighten things out.

"From now on," I told Gon severely, "chew gum!"

And, from then on, I kept a

pretty sharp eye on him. His dormitory roommate was Tu Wan, a Chinese-American engineering student. Occasionally, I'd send them tickets to a lecture or concert at Carnegie Hall. More frequently, Sal and I had them out to our small farm in the hills beyond Orange. Sally became quite fond of Gon.

Sally, of course, I love very much. But sometimes I wish she were less *vital*. Perhaps you have seen young matrons like her—radiantly joining now in this cause or that crusade, heading a Woman's Club drive or a pet Garden Club project. Just now, she was championing what the newspapers called the GRABS—more formally entitled the Good Roads and Anti-Billboard Society.

It was the Society's creed that roadside billboards were a blight on the landscape, a hazard to motoring and a menace to civilization, in general. Sally thought nothing of tangling with the powerful outdoor advertising lobby before legislative committees at Trenton. And, I wasn't surprised to learn, she'd hooked Gon into one of these hearings.

As the papers reported it, Gon merely got up, bowed and murmured, "In north Siam, do not have billboards."

He might have added that they didn't have any roads worth mentioning, either.

DESPITE my misadventure with Gon in Chiang Mai, when I'd so unsuccessfully tried to explain our work, it was naturally my wish that, after he finished his basic studies, he should major in seismology. So I didn't mind at all when he began hanging around our seismography observatory on Tech's upper Manhattan campus. We have several types of seismographs, fixed and portable, of varying magnifications, none of them of the Chiang Mai kind. And one day, I found Gon, obviously puzzled, studying our big Omori pendulum. I tried to explain it simply.

"When an earthquake occurs," I said, "this stylus vibrates and registers a sharp zigzag record on the smoked paper. You see how the paper rolls around on this drum? Well, it's marked in time units, so we can tell exactly when the quake occurs and how long it lasts."

"Ah, so, sir Dr. Parker." Gon nodded. "And can be told where happen?"

"Oh, yes, we can calculate that—just as we could on those in Chiang Mai," I said. But I didn't try to explain the complicated mathematical procedure. Instead, I showed him our framed recording of the big Tokyo earthquake of 1923, with its frantically fluctuating lines. In contrast, I then showed him a much fainter register of

a minor earth-shock on the Pacific Coast.

"Ah, so, Dr. Parker, yes," Gon said, bobbing his head. Then he grinned and pointed to the Tokyo chart. "No great fish?"

"No great fish," I said emphatically.

Still grinning, he touched the lesser register, "And no little men?"

"And," I answered savagely, "no little men!" I wondered if he were pulling my leg. I found it impossible to be sure.

It was only a couple of days later that Gon brought Tu Wan into the observatory. At first, I thought he was merely showing off. But Tu Wan returned with Gon two or three times, and I saw him making sketches. It was, perhaps, a month afterward when I found them in the workshop just off the observatory, tinkering with some sort of machine.

Coming up for a closer view, I was confronted with the craziest Rube Goldberg I'd ever seen. It was obviously meant to be a portable seismograph—at least it bore some resemblance to one. But, instead of a drum and roll of smoked paper, they'd installed a glass frame with a map laid on it. And, instead of a stylus, a long tailor's needle rested on the map. To make the thing even goofier, a miniature telephone hung on a hook attached to the machine.

"What," I exploded, "is this supposed to be?"

Gon snatched something from the map, then looked up and grinned proudly.

"Is secret," he said, while Tu Wan nodded gravely.

I examined the idiotic thing from every angle.

"Surely you don't expect to catch any earthquakes with this?" I asked.

"Oh, no, sir Dr. Parker."

"Then what in blazes is it for?" I asked again.

"Is secret," Gon repeated, holding his hand behind him.

I held out my own. "Give," I ordered in a dignified manner.

Reluctantly, Gon handed over a small piece of cardboard. It was a cut-out, drawn in the form of a curious, coiled fish, such as you often see on hand-painted Chinese screens.

"Great Scott!" I was exasperated. "We've got a delegation from the Geodetic Society coming here this afternoon, and if they saw this ridiculous contraption, we'd all become the laughing stock of seismology. Now, get this ridiculous contraption out of here!"

Gon looked at me for a long moment, and I thought I'd hurt his feelings. But I was wrong. His expression was more of forbearance. Obediently, yet with the utmost care, he and Tu Wan picked up the machine and lowered it into



a carrying case. Closing the case, they carried it away without a word.

IT was three months later—Monday, March 18, to be exact—when Brown, my assistant, excitedly called me from my office into the observatory.

"My God, Professor!" he exclaimed. "Force seven. And right across the Hudson, near Newark, if my calculations are right."

I followed him to the instruments we use for recording local disturbances. Ragged, zigzag lines on the smoked paper confirmed his announcement.

"But shouldn't we have felt it here in Manhattan?" he asked.

I was too worried to answer. My own computation showed that the epicenter was well beyond Newark, in the hills near our own farm. I reached for the phone.

After an unbearably long time, I was relieved to hear Sally's voice.

"Sal, did you feel an earthquake over there?"

"Why, no, dear," she said. "There's been nothing unusual. That is, unless—"

"Look," I interrupted. "Will you call around the neighborhood? Of course, it's barely possible our instruments could be out of order."

Ringling off, I called the Newark police.

"Huh?" growled the surprised desk sergeant. "Earthquake? Are

you off your rocker, mister? We ain't felt nothin' here."

From the Newark newspapers, I received a more civil answer—but not any more information. Then Sally called back. She said the local volunteer fire department and the civil defense unit had no reports, and what time would I be home for dinner?

Right after that, Doc Bickley called from Washington, where he's in charge of the Coast & Geodetic Survey's information exchange.

"Parker," he asked, "what the devil's going on up there?"

"Don't ask me," I replied. "Did you register it, too?"

"Did we! Force seven, right? We're getting wires from every station in the country. You mean there's no damage at all?"

"No—nothing," I said. "Apparently nobody even felt it."

What with checking and re-checking the instruments and making more calls and answering others, I was late getting home.

DID you find your old earthquake?" Sally asked. I said we hadn't and went upstairs to wash. When I came down for the warmed-over dinner she'd put together, I noticed that she was looking at me the way she sometimes does when she's trying to keep a secret. Invariably, she doesn't succeed.

Finally she announced complacently, "Well, we dood it."

"We dood what?" I asked, my mouth full of ham.

"Got rid of that awful old silo," Sally said.

"You what?"

This old silo was really an eyesore. It was of brick, and we'd long wanted to get rid of it. Yet, for all of Sally's genius at trying to beautify the rest of creation, it was still with us for the very simple reason that every estimate we'd gotten from the wreckers was too high.

"Got rid of the silo, silly," Sally repeated. "You and those high-priced estimates. Why—there was really nothing to it!"

"Explain it to me slowly," I said.

"And it took only two boys to do it—Gon and that Chinese, Tu Wan. They turned up this afternoon and asked if we still wanted it torn down, and when I said goodness yes, they went right out and did it."

I blinked.

"I wasn't there myself," Sally said. "They seemed to want to work alone. But I could see them fussing around at the bottom of it. And then, while you were phoning, they disappeared, and I didn't have the chance to ask them how they did it."

When I still stared, Sally said, "Well—if you don't believe me, go out and see for yourself."

I did. Though it was dark, I got out the car and swung it so the headlights were beamed in the silo's direction. And, sure enough, it wasn't there. There was only a pile of old brick.

"Maybe we can sell the brick," Sally said delightedly. "You know how I've been wanting that new spring coat."

I didn't say anything. I couldn't think of anything to say. The idea that two youngsters, neither very strong, could tear down that blasted silo in less than an hour left me confused. Uncomfortably, I remembered the stories of strange practices which I had heard in Chieng Mai. But they were all nonsense, of course.

The following day I thanked Gon.

"Oh, any time, sir Dr. Parker," he smiled. I didn't like the smug way he said it. But I didn't ask how they'd done the job. I don't suppose he would have told me, anyway.

THE next morning the seismographs recorded another earthquake. Again, the force was a severe seven and again it was in New Jersey—somewhere along U.S. 1, southwest of Newark. Again, nobody felt it. Again, there was no apparent damage—although the man at the Rahway fire department mentioned there'd been blasting nearby.

"Our seismographs," I replied crisply, "do not register surface explosions."

An hour later, Brown brought me an early edition of one of the afternoon papers. He showed me the front-page headline.

PHANTOM QUAKES
FOG SEISMOLOGY

Beneath it was one of those silly stories no reputable scientist enjoys.

"Makes us look pretty foolish, eh, Professor?"

By the time Doc Bickley called, I was seething. I felt that he was blaming me for not being able to find evidence of earthquakes in my own territory that Ottawa, Bermuda, the Naval Research lab in Washington and stations all over the world were recording.

"The papers," I complained, "are calling them phantom quakes."

"You have troubles?" Bickley jeered. "I have the whole National Security Council on my ear. They think Russia's invented a new underground weapon, and they've sicked the C.I.A. on us. I'll be up in the morning."

WHEN he arrived at nine, he had half a dozen C.I.A. agents with him. I didn't particularly relish having cloak-and-dagger people cluttering up my observatory,

but there wasn't much I could do about it. Bickley, a tall, brusque, elderly man, didn't seem to like the idea, either. Spy stuff was hardly our *métier*.

"You're just in time," I told him. "We snagged another one two hours ago, between Trenton and Princeton. You must have been passing nearby on the train about then."

"Same force?"

"Same force," I said. "Princeton has a geology team out to see what they can learn."

But Princeton's report, later in the morning, laid another large egg.

"The only thing hereabouts," the Princeton man said, "is a freak wind that knocked down a row of signboards."

That was the day the papers from London carried a theory by Sir Wendell Phipps-Cranston, of the International Union of Geophysics, that miles deep in the lower basaltic layer under New Jersey, new faults, greater than any hitherto known, were building up. While detectable by surface seismographs, Sir Wendell reasoned, people wouldn't necessarily feel them until a great cataclysm suddenly shook the region to pieces.

"That old goat!" Bickley snorted, throwing the paper down. But it was that statement that caused the National Security Council to

act. Through the Geodetic Survey, it ordered all stations to report further disturbances only by code and to withhold all information from the press.

CENSORSHIP! But the reason, of course, was to prevent mass hysteria. Still lying fallow in the Jersey mind was the mad result of that fabulous radio broadcast, the Orson Welles invasion from Mars, which had seen the mad scramble of people away from their homes.

While the reports dropped from the news, they did not drop from reality. The next morning, the seismographs recorded another quake epicenter near Asbury Park in Monmouth County—that afternoon, three more on the outskirts of New Brunswick, to the northwest. The following day, they were coming from the Camden area—and, during the next few hours, they followed a course along the White Horse Pike on the approach to Atlantic City.

Soon, worried actuaries were storming our office to confer with Bickley. One of the Geodetic Survey's most important functions is the supplying of information on which earthquake insurance rates are based. A major catastrophe in a normally non-seismic region could bankrupt the insurance companies.

More C.I.A. agents showed up. As fast as our instruments de-

tected a disturbance, they raced off in pairs to the scene. But, such is the human mind, even the trained observer may fall into error. And one who expects to encounter vast areas of damage, as I discovered later, can easily overlook lesser clues.

In our observatory, the agents set up a map, with colored pins marking epicenters. The idea was to try to show a pattern and perhaps to predict where the next disturbance would happen.

Studying the map, Bickley groaned. "Dammit, there's no rhyme or reason! They just jump around like grasshoppers."

God knows, our fear was real enough. It was that worst fear of all, the dread of the meaningless unknown.

"Do you think, Doc," I asked, "that all these years we've spent perfecting the science are wasted? That we've been misinterpreting nature all along?"

And because he didn't answer, I suspected he was thinking the same thing.

EIGHT days after the first recording, I received a call from the dean of men.

"That Siamese exchange student of yours," he began. "Did you know he hasn't attended classes for over a week?"

"You mean Gon?"

I hadn't given him a second

thought since this thing had started.

"Yes, and the same goes for his Chinese pal; Tu Wan."

That wasn't good. For, if the Immigration Authorities found out that Gon wasn't attending classes, he'd be sent home in a hurry.

I promised to look into it and, at lunchtime, I walked over to their diggings at the dormitory. Nobody had seen them for days.

I was plenty glum when I got home that night. And it didn't help to learn that Sally was off on one of her innumerable civic projects. When she dashed in, with all the breathless energy of a young colt, she found me sitting disconsolately in the living room, hoisting a fourth highball. She stopped in her tracks.

"Something wrong, dear?"

Since the first day, I hadn't told her about the troubles in the world of seismology. I hadn't wanted to alarm her. But now, with the whiskey loosening my tongue, I poured out the whole story. She listened sympathetically, but I could tell it didn't mean much to her.

"Then to cap it all," I added, "Gon and Tu Wan are missing."

For a moment she stared at me blankly. "Why," she finally exclaimed, "they aren't missing at all!"

It was my turn to stare.

"They've been working for me.

I mean," she amended, "for the Good Roads and Anti-Billboard Society."

I shook my head foggily. "For -you?"

"Of course!" Sally smiled. "You don't think we'd let that stupid legislature get away with it?"

"The legislature?" I repeated.

"Don't you remember? They wouldn't pass our anti-billboard law."

I poured another drink and thoughtfully mixed it. "Now, please," I said slowly, "let us try to be intelligent. Just what, exactly, do Gon and Tu Wan have to do with billboards?"

"They're tearing them down," Sally answered complacently. "All over the State. Haven't you been reading the news?"

She sailed into my study, which she also used for a sewing room, and returned with a batch of papers. Giggling, she perched on the arm of my chair, crossed her legs and pointed a slender finger to a headline in the Newark Call.

BILLBOARD VANDALS BAFFLE STATE COPS

State Police yesterday still hadn't nabbed the mysterious hoodlums who, for the past week, have been demolishing hundreds of billboards along the main highways of the State.

Striking with lightning rapidity, the wreckers use a hit-and-

run technique that has the troopers completely confounded. Nobody has seen them. One hour, a sign will be in place—the next, it will be flattened and splintered wreckage.

All evidence points to a highly-organized conspiracy, with the vandals working in large, efficient gangs. Billboard companies, estimating their losses in the scores of thousands, speak darkly of the crusade recently waged against them by the GRABS. However . . .

When I looked up, I was startled by Sally's expression. It was part rapture, part cunning. I could picture Carrie Nation looking just that way, too, after a particularly effective hatchet raid on an especially evil saloon. Shuddering, I downed my drink.

"They're starting in on those big illuminated signs up on Route 4 tonight," Sally announced then. "Of course, I don't know how they do it. But you remember the silo? That's when I—uh, some of the girls and I—got the idea."

MY palms were damp with sweat as I re-examined the newspaper, checking dates and places. Yes, they dovetailed neatly—far, far *too* neatly—with the seismograph recordings.

"Oh my God!" I exclaimed as the full and horrible significance began to dawn. And I was not

thinking of mere billboards. But Sally wasn't finished.

"Of course," she said, "we offered them money. But they'd take only expenses for the car they hired. Gon explained that he's a Buddhist, and that he was really doing this to acquire—how did he say?—merit for his next reincarnation. Isn't that nice? I mean, that someone can really believe in something like that. He says that in his next life he wants to be a white elephant like the Buddha was once."

"He's more likely to wind up in jail," I growled. And just then the phone rang. Sally jumped up and answered.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Parker," I heard her say brightly. "Who?" And then, after a pause: "Oh-h-h," strictly diminuendo. When she reappeared, her bounce was gone.

"They've been arrested," she said in a tiny, wondering voice.

With all due respect to the Texas Rangers, I don't think there are any bigger men in the country than the Jersey Troopers. And, in their black boots and yellow-striped blue uniforms, they were plenty imposing that night, as they confronted those two frail Asians, Tu Wan and Gon, in the charge room of the barracks, up on River Road and Harris Drive.

"Malicious destruction," the sergeant told me. "Tore down a whole row of 24-sheet billboards. A tree

fell on their car, and they couldn't make their usual getaway."

I frowned at the boys. They didn't seem the least bit worried.

"Nonsense," I said. "How could two little, skinny youngsters tear down a row of those big signs?"

"You got me, mister." The sergeant scratched his head.

But another trooper, who had been in on the arrest, interposed. "Look. We got orders to watch for suspicious characters hanging around signs, see? And when we see these two birds out in front of those boards, working on this thing . . ."

HE strode to a desk and flipped open the lid of a black case. And there, exposed, was the ridiculous contraption the boys had built.

"And then when the billboards fell down and the tree came with them . . ."

Gon interrupted hastily, "We misjudged, sir eminent Dr. Parker, sir. We did not mean to hurt tree."

"Quiet, Gon!" I warned. "Keep quiet until we get you a lawyer."

Sally and I walked over to inspect the thing.

"Why!" she said. "It's got a map of our township."

Gon and Tu Wan bowed, pleased.

"Yeah," grunted the sergeant. "But what in blazes does it do? Set off an explosion by remote control or something?"

"Oh, no, eminent sir sergeant," Gon said. "Like this he go—"

"Shut up!" I shouted.

"Let him talk," the sergeant said. "I want to see this."

Gon's eyes were half closed as he picked up a long wire and grounded it to a nearby radiator. He flicked a switch, and a tiny bulb flashed. Then, lifting the miniature telephone, he spoke into it in his own language for a moment. His voice seemed to caress the transmitter.

Finally, turning to us, he said, "The seismograph, sir eminent sergeant, catch earthquake on smoke paper on drum—not so, sir Dr. Parker, you say?"

I nodded.

"So!" Gon smiled. "We reverse process, yes? But how we do?"

From his pocket he produced the cardboard cut-out of the sleeping fish and placed it carefully on the map.

"What's he getting at, Doc?" the sergeant asked.

"Magic," I said miserably. "Imitative magic."

"Imitative *what*?" The sergeant glared. "Listen, Mac, are you nuts?"

"So we are here, yes?" Gon continued imperturbably. "River Road and Harris Drive, yes? So we move fish nose to same point, yes? And . . ."

I grabbed Sally and shoved her toward the door.

"... and push needle down on tail to make fish hurt," I heard Gon finish.

I could almost feel the fish jerking in pain as a low earth rumble sounded, familiar to any seismologist. A moment later the floor rose slowly and an entire side of the building fell out. Then, with a timing that could only have been rehearsed for such an emergency, Gon and Tu Wan skipped nimbly over the rubble and raced for my car.

"Un'stand now?" I heard Gon call. "Bye." And, while Sally and I and the troopers stood paralyzed, they roared away.

Of course, they were picked up before morning. But how could a charge stand against them? Can you imagine those sober, God-fearing State Troopers testifying that magic had wrecked those billboards and made a shambles of their barracks?

Tu Wan, as a citizen, was freed after much questioning. But Gon was deported. The Government dragged out the old charge of trying to import betel nuts. I think they missed a bet there. I think they should have hired him for the nation's defense. Perhaps they tried. But perhaps Gon thought he had acquired enough merit for a dozen reincarnations.

I had only a moment with him before they put him on the ship. "But why the telephone?" I asked.

Gon looked at me as if I were an idiot. "To tell little men not to worry, 'course," he said.

As for myself, I'm taking a leave of absence. It's not that my nerves are shot—which they are. But Sir Wendell was closer to the truth than he knew. Though not from the natural causes he supposed, new faults are indeed building up. What Gon did so precisely, you see, was to create many new faults, then to control them so exactly that the surface disturbances were pinpointed just where he wanted them.

What he could not understand, because his technical knowledge was so superficial, was that the faults are still there, scattered here and about, deep down under New Jersey and its five million people. And they grow—they grow—until, someday, the whole surface will cave in.

What I am hoping is that, when I reach Siam, the Buddhist monks can teach me how to close them up again. If they will, I'd like them to call in their little men. My only hope is to be in time.

Franklin Gregory

By **MANLY BANISTER**

Room Without Windows

Every man is entitled to think

what he pleases . . . or, at least, that

is what he's entitled to think!

I HAD never really liked Lavorine De Valgis. I didn't like his name or the sly, lecherous attitude he could assume when telling an off-color story. I didn't like his insisting upon a friendship I didn't want, and I didn't like loaning him money—though he always paid back with great punc-

tuality. I didn't like him around the house, either, but he would drop in now and again to spend an evening with Ethel and me. He accepted our civil politeness as entertainment and never failed to return.

I am an advertising copywriter. Lord knows what De Val-

Illustrated by VIDMER

gis was. He had property and access, at least, to money. He never borrowed for longer than a few days at a time. I met him, one day, in a client's office and it was politics on my part to be friendly. I've always regretted it.

De Valgis disturbed me more than he did Ethel. Maybe she got a kick out of the way he ogled her. But I didn't like it.

I wanted to kick him, you know where, but Ethel always pooh-poohed me about him. She pointed out that De Valgis was old and needed friends and companionship.

He wasn't so old—maybe sixty—but I reluctantly conceded her point.

"Just so you don't get too damned companionable," I said.

And then—just like that—Lorraine De Valgis upped and disappeared. But before he vanished, he did a peculiar thing. He deeded his house across town to me and Ethel.

A GLUM-LOOKING shyster by the name of Smithers dropped by one evening and delivered the deed, our first knowledge of the affair. Obviously, De Valgis had told the lawyer nothing of his business and Smithers was anxious to get the lowdown from me. Some people can't help being curious that way.

Smithers got no help from us.

We were even more puzzled and flabbergasted. He went away looking disappointed, and we never saw him again.

"Poor old Mr. De Valgis," Ethel sighed. "Where do you suppose he went, Jack? And why didn't he tell us where he was going?"

"Maybe he got overcome by a generous impulse," I suggested, "but I doubt it. Mark my words, with De Valgis in it, there is also a joker."

Ethel clapped her hands. "Oh, Jack, don't you realize what's happened? *We've* got a house! Now we can quit renting this vile hut and—"

"*We've* got a house," I interrupted, "but not for long, honeybun."

"How come—not for long?"

"Sell it, baby—sell it! We collect the moola—buy a new car. Get it?"

Ethel looked disappointed. Her round little face got long. Her mouth and eyes made three circles—two blue ones and one lusciously red—and her nose quivered. She looked real sad. You know—sad.

That was just the beginning. I guess we quarreled after that. At least, if we'd heard a couple of other people saying the things we said to each other, we would have thought they were quarreling. With Ethel and me, it was merely a

minor disputation of my authority, which I cleared up pretty fast.

"At least," she said wistfully, dabbing at her eyes, "we can go over and see the house before we sell it?"

"Sure," I said, feeling magnanimous. I could just feel that dough in my two mitts—enough for a new convertible and some left over. I even wasted a few precious seconds of my life in fond recollection of that confounded satyr, De Valgis.

"I've seen the dump, honey. You wouldn't like living there, anyway—even if we didn't need a new car. I'll stop by after work, tomorrow night, and see that everything's shipshape. Then we can both run over any time later. It takes lots of time to sell a house."

IT was one of those big, old-style places—Georgian, I think it's called. It would have cost De Valgis a fortune to keep it up, but he hadn't done much about it. It needed paint and new windows—a dozen other things. Ethel and I couldn't afford to live here, if we did any fixing. But I could let the next owner worry. I was getting out from under—profitably.

With a premature song in my heart, I fitted the key Smithers had given me into the lock and went in.

In spite of many invitations from De Valgis, this was my first

venture inside his house. I wouldn't have taken Ethel in there on a bet—not while De Valgis was around. And I had made a point of not finding an excuse to call on the old coot myself. I'd seen the outside of the place, but it was not wholly in keeping with the inside.

The rooms were surprisingly light and sunny. Clean—well furnished in a rather old-fashioned style. It was late when I got there, and shadows were deepening in the upper corners of the rooms. But I took my time, until finally it got so dusky I had to turn on the lights as I went from room to room.

There was much here that indicated another, earlier life of De Valgis. Apparently, he had once been a family man. There were pictures of a pretty young woman and a couple of kids—family type stuff—but the clothing styles showed they had been taken long ago.

The library puzzled me. De Valgis had owned a lot of books and had left them all in the house. I often wondered how he made a living and, I thought, perhaps his library would give me a clue. I had never been interested enough to wonder before.

The first book I took off the shelf was something called *Talents et études de la diablerie* by a Vicomte de something-or-other. It was in French. After I'd spelled

out a couple of words, my high school French broke down and I put the book back on the shelf. The next was a big, moldy old tome with fragmenting leather covers, titled *Wissenschaft des Teufelkundes* by Otto Braun.

That's the way the whole library went—one foreign language after another, most of which hit me right in the middle of my ignorance. Some in Spanish, some in Italian, some in Greek, Danish, Norwegian—I don't know what all. Finally—one in English. This one dispelled any doubt I had had of my translations of occasional previous titles. It was called, *Studyes in ye Carnale Knowledge of ye Devilhood eke ye Satanik Wytchcraft e wyth ye Receipts for ye Conjuring up of ye Daemons*. A long title, but it was a big book.

It had maybe a hundred thick, yellowish sheets of some kind of cured skin—and it was entirely handwritten. The writing was spidery, in faded red that could have been red ink, but I suspected it wasn't. Each page was illuminated with washed-out drawings of witches and demons.

SINCE the writing was difficult to read and was phrased in jaw-breaking archaisms, I put it back on the shelf. I wish I had read it. Maybe if I had, I wouldn't have gone into the Room Without Windows.

I had warned Ethel that there'd be a joker in the deck. But I walked right into it. I was going through the upstairs hall, exploring each room as I came to it. The Room Without Windows was at the very end of the hall, across the back stairwell from the bath. There was a note, addressed to me and Ethel, pinned to the solid oak door.

Dear Jack and Ethel:

By now you know that I have gone away. I am returning to visit relatives in Europe. I may stay there the rest of my life, so do not expect me back. However, if I do come back, the house is still yours, because I have deeded it to you as a gift—for being my most beloved friends. But please take care of the books that are in the library. If I do come back, I shall want them.

You are doubtless wondering why I am giving you this fine house. I give it to you because I know I can trust no other. This house must never be sold. Behind this door—the one to which I shall pin this note—lies a secret that must never be disturbed. I know I can trust you not to enter this room. After your lifetimes, the danger will no longer exist. I cannot explain this further. Just live in this house and be happy. But do not sell. I know that, as my friends, I can trust you to follow my wishes.

L. De V.



I thrust the note into my pocket. De Valgis didn't know me as well as he thought he did. I'm not very curious about most things—not any more than the next fellow. I ignore things that aren't my business.

But this *was* my business. It was *my* house now, wasn't it?

I went down to my car and got a claw hammer from the tool kit. Then I yanked out the ten-penny nails De Valgis had driven into the beautiful oak door.

Those nails were proof to me he didn't trust me as much as he claimed.

While I was yanking nails, believe me, I did plenty of thinking. I thought all kinds of things. Maybe this was a room filled with treasure—money, stacks of bullion, stuff like that—loot. I also thought of the possibility of cold corpses—female corpses, knowing De Valgis.

At any rate, I wondered what was in that room and I meant to find out.

By the time I got the door open, sweat was running down into my eyes. Maybe I didn't see so good, I don't know. It looked like an ordinary room to me but there weren't any windows. And the walls were yellow. It was a funny kind of yellow that came and went, sort of. Played tricks on your vision—seemed to pull your eyeballs out like a pair of golf balls

and cross them over—you get what I mean?

I stepped over the sill, and the yellow walls suddenly seemed to close in on me like clouds of swirling gas. I couldn't see anything but that blinding, foggy yellow. I gasped and looked over my shoulder. The door was gone. I whirled around six ways at once and took a step. The yellow had vanished.

I HAD stepped through that door into Heaven—I thought. I was standing on a dun-colored beach and the wind blew in cool over white-capped surf. Palm trees tossed, gaunt and lovely, against the yearning blue of the sky. It was terrific!

And the girls—the babes—they littered the beach like driftwood. Live driftwood, carved into delectable form and substance. And not one of those living, breathing dolls was dressed in anything more than a copywriter's imagination at five o'clock . . .

I got just one good eyeful—believe me, it was good—and there was that yellow fog again, swirling and boiling, blotting out the most luscious sight I had ever seen in my life.

I must have taken a step backward to bring it on. I lurched forward, and there was the door jamb, right in front of me, looming through the yellow fog. I went

skidding out into the hall and almost plunged over the railing into the back stairwell.

What I should have done was nail the door up again. What I wanted to do was tear back through it and get acquainted with some of the dolls I had seen. But I suddenly realized it must be getting late and Ethel would be wondering about me. There was plenty of time to go through that door again.

I slammed the oak panel and beat it out of the house.

I should have told Ethel all about it. But what I had seen had given me ideas—and now I didn't want to sell the place. I didn't want to discuss it with her, either. But there was no way I could fend off her questions. And she had plenty.

"I want to see the house for myself," she finally concluded, fed up with my hemming and hawing.

"Look," I said, "you *don't* want to see it. It isn't *worth* seeing . . ."

"Can't I even look at it *once* before we sell it?"

"Sell it?" I gaped.

"Do you mean to say you don't want to sell it?"

"Yeah, sure, but—maybe it isn't worth selling."

"That's wonderful, Jack! Then maybe we can move in!"

"No such!" I yelled in spite of my determination to remain cool.

Ethel looked hurt and mad, both at once.

"Then I'll *see* it—and you'll take me over—this weekend. I don't know why you're acting so funny, but I'll find out. You act as if the place is full of showgirls and you don't want me to find out about it!"

WOMEN have no intuition—banish the idea! They just have a sharp insight into the nature of Man, which comes from living with the brutes. I kept my mouth shut for the rest of the evening and, on Saturday, I took Ethel over to the house.

I thought maybe I could stall her off about the room, once we got there. I didn't tell her about De Valgis' note. I should have. Maybe that would have stopped her, but I don't think so.

Ethel was so charmed with the place she didn't even pause to bawl me out—though I could see she was saving it for later. But it made me feel good just to see her so tickled. I almost forgot about the room without windows and, when I did think of it, I solemnly promised myself I would not only nail the door shut, I'd build a wall over it. When Ethel's eyes shone the way they did, I knew I didn't give a hoot for the babes on the other side of that mysterious portal.

I kissed Ethel once in the upper hall, but she looked around my arm and spotted the oak door with

fragments ripped out of it where I had yanked out De Valgis' nails.

"What a shame! Somebody has ruined this beautiful door!"

She ran to it, before I could fasten a good hold on her, and pulled it open. Then she stepped through—and vanished.

I didn't think of harm coming to her. It was the thought of her and those babes on the beach that made my blood run hot, then cold. I knew what Ethel would have to say to me once she got an eyeful.

I took off after her, yelping like a turpented hound dog. I was fully prepared to meet the cloud of swirling yellow fog but, even so, I threw up my arm as I entered, as if to fight it off.

Naturally, I expected to land on De Valgis' mysterious beach again, and see Ethel looking the babes over with that belligerent look I knew so well.

But no beach—no Ethel. It was dark and there were stars in the sky. There was a piney scent in the air. Looking up, I could see tall trees cutting ragged silhouettes against the stars.

I stood on a gravel road. Just then, a car turned off a side road about a hundred yards away. Headlights swept in an arc toward me, lighting one row after another of cars parked along the road. The flashes gave me a brief glance into each car. I knew where I was—in a lovers' lane . . .

I stepped forward—into broad daylight. I was standing on the patio of a large hotel. It was built of some kind of pink stone and there were men and women strolling in pairs on white graveled paths. Palm trees rustled in the breeze.

I was still blinking when I took my next step—into a dim-lit hall filled with the blare of music. A number of couples danced in a languorous atmosphere of cologne, liquor fumes and cigarette smoke.

Another step—and I was in a hotel room. It was night and, outside the window, the hotel sign blinked on and off—on and off. I didn't dare move for fear I would bump into something in the dark.

I heard a sound and turned my head that way. The hotel sign went *plock* and the room dimly lighted up. I looked at the bed—and hastily took another step. I was glad it took me out of there!

IT was sunny afternoon on a hilltop. There was rolling countryside all around, brushed and forested. Where was Ethel? Where was I? Each step had taken me into a different scene. Had the same thing happened to Ethel? Was she ahead of me in some scene I had not yet glimpsed? Or was she here—somewhere on this hilltop? If I could stop and look around . . .



The ground was littered with boulders. Bushes grew between—grass—tall firs nodded restlessly in the wind.

I took a step and this time the scene stayed put. Wishing land? Wish you'd stay put and you would? I walked around cautiously. There was something fishy here—something familiar. I thought of the scenes I had passed through. They seemed like some memories I had. Or *were* they memories? Anyway, all these places seemed familiar.

I looked down the hill. I had expected to see a road winding around the bottom, and there it was. I saw a snappy convertible—like the one I'd had in mind to buy if we sold De Valgis' house. It was parked at the edge of the road. A young fellow and his girl were climbing the hill. They had supplies for a picnic in their arms.

I was tempted to call out to them, but I didn't. They went behind a large rock. The young man was shaking out a blanket. I thought I had better go some place else and look for Ethel.

I stepped into a wide, brightly lit hall that seemed to go on and on into the distance. It was lined on both sides with heavy doors.

I looked both ways before moving, and one of the doors swung open and a young man came bounding out. He stopped short at sight of me.

"What are *you* doing here?" he asked rudely.

His attitude made me surly. "How should I know where *here* is?" I retorted. "I'm lost, and I'm looking for my wife."

The fellow grinned in a malicious way. "You won't find her here—your wife, eh? You probably won't find her in the whole Domain. From the looks of *you*, I'd say she's had her Hell on Earth."

I began to get hot under the collar. I was confused and angry. I wanted Ethel—and I wanted to get out of here. This was no place for either of us. If my mind had been working, I'd have bolted back then and there—with or without Ethel.

I said, "Enough of your comments, Mac. Just show me the way out of here."

The young man frowned, then began to laugh. "You've been wandering among the sets! Must be the ones that caught you. Say, did any of the places seem familiar to you?"

I nodded, half of a mind to bust him one.

He yelped. "That's traffic! Pulled one in through the sets! Wait till the boss hears about this! Come on, you."

THERE was a spate of yellow fog that swirled, thinned and cleared away. I stood on the carpet in a respectable-looking office.

There were comfortable chairs before a long, mahogany desk. I sat down in one, my eyes glued to the man behind the desk. He had a phone clamped to each ear and was yelling a stream of profanity into both. There was no sign of my erstwhile acquaintance.

"Get the figures!" yodeled the blubbery character around his cigar. "Blankety-blank! I said figures! Yes, blankety-blank! Sales! What? Not enough! Blankety, blank . . . there's no *benefit* in that head!"

It all sounded weirdly reminiscent to me—like a copy chief. I looked around, trying warily to seem at ease until the fellow noticed me.

On one wall a large sign in big red letters read: THINK! Beside it, equally large and gory, another sign read: HURRY! Directly behind the cursing man was a neatly framed placard: *If you've only written it three times, it isn't good enough.*

On the wall to my right, a sign proclaimed: *If the lead is right, the story has got to be right.*

Another sign on Two-Phones' desk read: *What's a Head without a Body? Follow up!*

Wherever I was, I thought, it smelled like home. I was in an advertising office. I could relax. If there's anybody who can show you the way out of anything, it's an advertising man.

With a growl, the ape at the desk slammed both phones into their cradles and scowled at me. "What's your line?"

"I—I'm lost . . ."

"So is everybody. What do you do?"

"Advertising copywriter. But that isn't . . ."

He waved a big hand. "Don't talk—I'm thinking. You like advertising?"

"I do it for a living."

"It isn't the same, but it doesn't matter." He brooded over his cigar. He grunted. "Need a man—a good one."

Both phones began to ring at once. He swept them off onto the floor, where they crashed and commenced to squawk futilely. His eyes narrowed into puffy slits.

"We can use you!" He looked bitterly at the squawking telephones. "Damned incompetents!" He lifted his glance heavily to me. "Not that you'll be any better—just different." He sat back. "I could check the records on you, but no time. Allatimehurryhurryhurry!" He ran the words together and drooled. "All the *damn* time!" He looked at me bleakly.

"Sorry," I said. "I'm not in the market, Mr.—uh . . . ?"

"Schlemiel."

I smiled politely and waited for the punch line. There wasn't any, so I assumed the handle was real.

"I came here looking for my wife. All I want it to find her and get back home."

Schlemiel shook his head morosely. His fat lips waggled back and forth. "No use. Didn't you ever read Dante, son?"

"Sure. So what?"

"Abandon hope, son. You're dead, see? It's all done with—*vorbei—ausgespielt*. You've come to the Happy Hunting Grounds." He grunted. "Happy Hunting!"

"Dead, hell!" I flared.

"Hell—yes—Hell," he muttered. "Where else did you think you were? You came in through the advertising sets, somehow. They're your own, by the way, did you know that? We've had 'em on tapes for years, just to get you in here. You thought they were dreams—desires of your own. Your copywriter did a good job on them. You're here—and here to stay!"

"Oh, no—" I began.

Schlemiel got up, came around his desk and laid a heavy hand on my shoulder. "This is Hell's Advertising Department, son. We're the boys who gave you the ideas that made you sin and fall. Being an advertising man, you came right here, instead of going on down below—where it's hotter."

I began to understand. No wonder those scenes had been familiar. Thoughts I had nourished . . . I began to get red. I had seen only a few. Were the others . . . ?

"Every indecent thought you ever had came directly from this department, son," Schlemiel went on. "How do you think we get all the dead into Hell?"

"But I'm *not* dead!" I blurted.

"Son," Schlemiel boomed hollowly, "you are faced with an irrefutable logic. Nobody *but* the dead get to Hell. *You* got to Hell. Ergo, you are dead."

"All I want," I said desperately, "is to get the hell out of here!"

"I *like* that!" roared Schlemiel. "Boy, how I like it! I really do. Boyohboyohboy!"

He went off into rippling primitive chuckles.

What could you do with an ape like that?

I said, "I don't believe this is Hell. All those people I saw were having a good time."

Schlemiel gripped my shoulder affectionately. "You miss the props you've heard about all your life, son. Forget 'em—this is nineteen fifty-four. We left the red monkey suits, the horns and the tails back in the Middle Ages, where they belong. And as for those people on the sets—they ain't real, son. They're just thoughts—bait that brings in traffic. We broadcast a little of that stuff, and bingo! Hell's potential population goes up fifteen per cent—amortized in another generation."

He cut loose with a bellow of hearty laughter. "Get the joke,

son? Amortized! Haw, haw, haw!"

He was a real demon, this Schlemiel.

NONE of my protests did any good. Schlemiel signed me on without further preliminaries and turned me over to one of his flunkies. On him, a red devil suit would have looked good.

"Copywriter, hey?" he said. "If you can do as good copy as the stuff that brought you here, you won't be half good enough. I got a real toughie of a client for you—a nut we've been trying to crack for years."

The "client" turned out to be a settlement of recluses in the backwoods of Georgia. My job—to entice them into Hell.

I had to think up allurements that would appeal to a recluse—if that wasn't a hellish assignment, I sure was in the wrong place!

I toyed with the thought of indirect advertising. In a town near the settlement of recluses, flourished a bawdy house. Now, a one-cent sale . . . Nope—bargains in Sin are too common.

In the office given to me was a second desk. I wondered who sat there—or if I was to have the office to myself. Between wondering how I was going to allure a bunch of freaks that didn't want allurements, and how I was going to get out of here, I wondered where Ethel was.

Just then the door burst open and Ethel came hopping in, Schlemiel's flunky right behind her.

"I'm *not* a copywriter!" she yelled at him over her shoulder, looking as belligerent as I had ever seen her. "I don't belong here! I want to go home! If my husband Jack—"

Then she saw me. Her eyes got big and round and her mouth dropped into a red, juicy O. She did a double take, primmed her lips and her eyes began to snap.

"So—my fine-feathered husband!" she snarled to me. "I see *now* what I have been married to all these years. A dyed-in-the-wool demon—a devil in human form!"

"Nothing of the sort," I hollered, jumping up. "I came here looking for you—and they put me to work!"

Schlemiel's flunky snickered over Ethel's shoulder. "We got him dead to rights. Don't tell me you two know each other?"

"No," said my wife sweetly. "I thought we did, but it seems I was mistaken. Furthermore, I wouldn't want to know this character."

"Stop acting silly," I said.

"Who's silly? When I consorted with you, I was an innocent dupe. I didn't know any better. I could never have guessed . . ."

"Listen to me!" I said firmly. "Get this into your head. I'm *not* a devil. I *don't* belong here. I've been good all my life and I—"

"I don't believe a word of it!"

I pointed an accusing finger at her. "How did *you* get here? What kind of thoughts were *you* having?"

She dropped her proud glance. Her little ears pinked with embarrassment.

"*Aha!* I thought so. You know only too well that *those* were some of the wicked thoughts *you've* had in your life."

"Jack," Ethel whimpered, "is it true you aren't really . . . ?"

"You're darned tootin' it's true. Come on, Honeybun—I'll be forgiving if you . . ."

"*Down to business!*" yelled the flunky. "*Get to work!*"

"Stand aside, Mac," I yelled right back. "We're getting out of here."

"Nuh-uh," said he. "You forget—you're dead. You can't go any place . . ."

"Dead, huh?" I swung a haymaker. The demon bounced off the wall, then off the floor. He flashed, screaming, out of the room.

"Live 'uns!" I could hear him yell in diminuendo. "There're live 'uns in the place!"

I couldn't figure what had made him bounce, because when I'd swung, I hadn't felt anything. But I guess *he* felt it and that's what really let him know we were alive.

"I think I got it figured," I said to Ethel. "Do as I say and maybe we can find our way out of here."

I held her close to my side and we both took a step backward. Schlemiel dropped both phones from his head as we passed through his office. Another step, and we were on the sunny hilltop. I hated having to take Ethel back through my own indelicate thoughts, but I wanted to make sure we both got back. I gritted my teeth and stepped backward as rapidly as possible.

WE moved into De Valgis' house a week after. It's not a bad place, once you get used to it. The library now has some innocuous texts in it and lots of bare shelves. I took the junk De Valgis must have spent a lifetime collecting and stashed it away in the attic.

And the Room Without Windows? I nailed the door shut and built a new wall across in front of it.

We hardly ever go upstairs, Ethel and I, unless we are together. And neither of us ever reproaches the other for naughty thoughts. Every time we hear an unexpected step on the front porch, we both rush to fling open the door. We hope it will be Lavorne De Valgis standing there. We want to give him back his house.

Manly Banister

It's

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

THE octagonal, golden-oak framed clock on the wall of Engine House #513, Manhattan, read 8:02 P.M. of April 5th, 1912, when the alarm bell clanged its summons. Big Pete Wolachzewski lost interest in the domino-strewn upended hosereel in front of him, cocked a cherry-pink ear of outrageous outsize and said, in an unexpectedly high voice, "That's the Dress Emporium down on West Broadway. Let's roll."

With his usual ineffable grace, Big Pete lurched to his feet, upsetting the improvised sniff table and sending his chair skittering backward directly upon the firehouse cat in the process. He then tripped over his own size thirteens and did an off-to-Buffalo into one of the recently emptied horse-stalls that stood in lonely obsolescence against the west wall of the brick building.

Mike McDonnel, left holding the double-six which would have capped and sealed a carefully engineered victory, rose more slowly, uttering a string of musty Gaelic oaths.

Tony Malino, trotting by en route to the driver's seat of the gleaming new LaFrance steam pump, smiled sympathetically and murmured, "Remember, Michael, every firehouse must have its pole."

"That may be," replied McDonnel bitterly, "but why did we



Not The Heat

**FIREBUG, BATTY OVER
OLD FLAME, SETS
WHOLE CITY ABLAZE
"But Which City?" He
Asks in Bewilderment**

Illustrated by EMSH



have to draw Wolachzewski?"

The question went unanswered in the bustle of the alarm.

IN a dimly lit saloon around the corner on Christopher Street, Larry Frayne shivered as the engine bell was swallowed up in the roar of Engine House #513's 20 horse-power juggernaut. He tugged the broken brim of his grimy cap down over rheumy eyes, masking with the gesture a secretive smile of sheer delight at a job well done. He decided to celebrate and, pushing his empty shot-glass across the mahogany, said, "Make it the two-for-a-quarter bourbon this time, Jimmy."

"Making like Pierpont Morgan tonight?" queried the bartender amiably as he filled two shot-glasses with dark amber fluid. He deftly plucked from the mahogany the quarter Larry Frayne had carelessly dropped there, before it had finished spinning. Then he added, "Well, how do you like the Giants this season? By the spring training reports, Matty is over the hill."

"Aw, he's still got that Fade-away," was Larry's considered reply. "And that kid Marquard won 26 last year—he should be good for 30 easy. McGraw's a shoo-in—till he meets Connie's boys in the Series."

"The Giants took the As easy in 1906," the bartender said hopefully.

"That was six years ago," Larry reminded him. "Things is different now."

"You may be right," muttered the bartender, brushing the tips of his lush mustache with his bar-towel as he moved away in answer to another summons.

Alone once more, Larry listened to the last fading echoes of the fire engine bell and considered his own professional excellences. This particular arson was beautifully tailored to suit the desires of his lovely blonde employer. It would make a lot of smoke and flame, but only on part of the top floor—where the damage to the stock would be negligible—a concrete retaining wall and careful placement of incendiary fluids would see to that.

Truly, it was a night to be happy, to celebrate, to burn up the town.

He felt the need of more sensual pleasure and pulled from a side pocket the handkerchief he had plucked from the boudoir table of the beauteous Tamara Jahnes, to inhale a whiff of the exquisite perfume that lingered in its cambric folds. The delicate floral aroma, like a Straus waltz or a Lyon-decker collar ad, made him nostalgic for a romantic elegance he had never known, never would know.

However, what emerged from the pocket in his grimy fingers was

a five-cent blue bandanna, purchased only the day before from a peddler's pushcart on Delancey Street. Cheap printed whorls and curlicues, rather than the intricate embroidery of Tamara's monogram, greeted Larry's appalled gaze.

His normally blotchy face assumed a smooth and even pallor. He realized that he had made a dreadful mistake in setting the London Bridge Dress Emporium fire—to which the new steam pump of Engine House #513 was speeding apace—with his employer's handkerchief for a wick, rather than with the unidentifiable bandanna.

For, in the Frayne fire-setting technique, large portions of the wick frequently survived the holocaust around it.

Before Jimmy the bartender's astonished eyes, Larry ignored an already paid-for drink and slipped silently, swiftly, out into the night. He didn't exactly know what he was going to do about his inexplicable blunder—but it seemed a good idea to get as close to the scene as he could. After all, if the worst happened and Tamara were caught, it meant Larry would have to go to work—a ghastly contingency.

Anyway, his own alibi for the time of the fire was already solidly set with Jimmy and other denizens of the saloon.

THE beauteous Tamara Jahnes was dawdling over lemon sherbet laced with kirsch, beneath the crystal chandeliers of the Brevoort dining room, when the gleaming red and white and gold steam pump from Engine House #513 roared past the tall arched windows on its way to Washington Square and the London Bridge Dress Emporium. She laced coral-tipped fingers gracefully and rested a softly perfect cheek against them and said, "A fire—how exciting! Arthur, shall we . . . ?"

Her companion laid his double damask dinner napkin on the gleaming white-on-white tablecloth and said, "A pleasure, m'dear." Carelessly, he tossed a bill of large denomination upon it and stood aside to follow the gorgeous and very blonde Tamara from the extremely elegant room.

Nor was Arthur Damon out of place in such surroundings. Indeed, even more than for Miss Jahnes, the muted and costly opulence of his environment seemed to have been created for just such as he. His broadcloth and satin dinner jacket had obviously been hand cut for a figure that was a tailor's delight. His sleek dark hair, impeccably groomed, framed a sage, sardonic, aquiline face that suggested the wisdom of maturity without loss of the ardors of youth.

His real name was Arthenazeus Daemon, and he came from the

South—from an extremely warm and densely populated South, where he held the lucrative satrapy of Undersatan of Lower North America. At the moment he was on holiday—a sort of busman's holiday. He was ready, nay eager, to go to a fire.

In fact, thanks to recently altered conditions in his homeland, Arthur Damon had become something of a fire buff. For, in his wisdom, the great Underlord himself had extinguished the fires of Hell—since that vast portion of non-corporeal humanity condemned to his care suffered far more acutely from high humidity than from mere heat. It was important that Hades keep up with the times—and flames dried up the moisture of the under-atmosphere, even as in the Upperworld.

Hence the fires of Hell were extinguished—by Satanic decree. And Undersatan Arthenazeus Daemon was a fire buff on Earth.

Seated beside the beauteous Tamara in a hansom cab, he eyed with amusement the small indications of his companion's restlessness, her eagerness to reach the scene of the holocaust. Signs that might have passed unnoticed under the regard of a less astute and acute inspector—a slight decultur-ing of soft accents, an all but inaudible tapping of tiny satin mules, a microscopic distention of delicately arched nostrils. But, of

course, thanks to unimpeachable sources of information, Arthur Damon knew exactly what was happening.

Tamara Jahnes, proprietress and manager of the vastly successful Tamara Modes Shop, was about to acquire her autumn stock at a tremendous bargain. And Arthur was going to enjoy watching the sinful shrewdness with which she managed the transaction.

Of course, it was he who had arranged the switched handkerchief joker in the otherwise neatly stacked deck. He found himself anticipating with relish such complications as this prank might cause. For Tamara was a young woman of remarkable resourcefulness, and he enjoyed viewing such a clever sinner operating under pressure.

Otherwise, it would have been just another fire. Not that that was anything to sneeze at, in view of current conditions in his home.

THE top story of the London Bridge Dress Emporium was blazing away merrily as he ran interference for the beauteous Tamara through a rapidly enlarging crowd. What with smoke, flames and helmeted firemen—to say nothing of the gleaming stack on the huge engine, the play of hoses and the swarm of onlookers—it was a scene to warm a demon's heart—especially since he

knew the fire was of human origin.

A furtive figure in a broken-brimmed cap slunk past him to tug at Tamara's leg-of-mutton sleeve and cry, "Tamara, I got to tell . . ."

To which, in an almost strident voice, Tamara said, "How many times have I got to tell you to stay away? Skidoo, Larry!"

"But, Miss Jahnes—Tamara—I made a bad . . ."

"Is this scoundrel annoying you?" Arthur Damon swung about, in full majesty of black tie, red satin-lined cape and opera hat, brandishing his cane. The little man squealed and ducked into the crowd.

"Thank you, Arthur." Tamara's gloved hand touched his arm gratefully. A burly fireman barred their path. Then, recognizing Damon, who had a special badge from the Commissioner, he stepped aside to allow him and his lady to go by.

"Looks like it'll be out right quick, sir," he said.

Within the fire-lines, there were comparatively few souls about. Tamara made a beeline for a large portly gentleman with a bright red face, who was watching the proceedings with a glazed expression. She said, "Rotten luck, Mr. Healy—but I suppose you're insured."

Mr. Healy, wretched owner of the dress emporium, tore his gaze away from the horror of the already waning flames. He recog-

nized Tamara and shook his head sadly. "Lapsed last month, worse luck," he said. "This'll put me out of business, for sure."

She struck like an eagle. "Will you sell the entire stock, as is, for five thousand in cash?" she asked him.

Mr. Healy sighed miserably. "Forty thousand dollars worth of brand new imported coats and dresses," he moaned.

"You'll be lucky to get three thousand for them at a sale," she said. "I'll write you a check for five right now."

It was done in a matter of minutes. And, even as the check changed hands, the smoke dwindled and the flames went out.

A LARGE fireman emerged from the front door dragging a brass nozzle. He fell over the doorsill and sprawled headlong at the feet of Arthur, Mr. Healy and Miss Jahnes.

Picking himself up, the clumsy fireman said politely, "Hello, Mr. Damon—not much of a fire, was it?" Then, to Miss Jahnes, "Hi, Tamara." He frowned, reached into a pocket of his raincoat, pulled out a half-charred wisp of cambric, offered it to her, and said, "Maybe you'd like this for a souvenir? I found it in there." He nodded toward the building he had just left. "Right beside a big tin of kerosene. It's got your initials."

"But it can't be mine!" she exclaimed, eying it. "What would my handkerchief be doing in there?"

"Don't ask me," was the reply, "but it sure got your initials." He offered it to her again and this time she took it and quickly stuffed it out of sight in her silver-mesh evening bag.

"Forty thousand dollars!" moaned Mr. Healy, insensible to all else except his loss and the check in his hands. He wandered off into the night, muttering to himself.

"Tough," said Big Pete Wola-chzewski with clumsy sympathy. He removed his helmet, and an odd thing happened. With the flames out, the street had become almost dark. Neighborhood urchins had long since availed themselves of the confusion to smash the street lamps, and only the dim headlights of the fire engines provided illumination.

Only the headlights and Big Pete's ears. These large twin appendages glowed like twin mazdas in the gloom.

Even the beauteous Tamara noticed this phenomenon. She said, "Pete, your ears are shining."

Abashed, Big Pete clapped his helmet back on his head to conceal his glowing ears. He muttered, "That Larry Frayne must be around. Ever since I pulled him out of the powerhouse last winter, that time we fell on the live wires, my ears light up when he's within

fifty feet of me. We both got a big charge of volts, and I came out positive—that's what they tell me. Larry oughta stay away from fires. It's downright embarrassing."

Arthur Damon suppressed a smile at the fury the beauteous Tamara barely held in check. For, while the Modes Store proprietress rightly claimed exotic European origin, her claim was correct in name only. Actually, she had not fled the Czar's court as a debutante hotly pursued by a lecherous archduke—but had arrived much earlier by steerage, a tiny immigrant tot, to be reared in the same tenement block with both Big Pete and Larry Frayne.

She said, "Pete, about the stock. Is it much damaged?"

"Not too bad, Tamara," was the reply. "There'll be some water damage, of course—but mostly on the top floor."

"Think it's incendiary?" Arthur Damon asked mischievously.

"Not much doubt of it," was the prompt answer. "We run into a lot of that." He shook his head ponderously at the sinfulness of some humans. "Probably the owner wanted to collect some insurance."

"We ought to get together more often, Pete." The beauteous Tamara was suddenly all warmth and promise. "After all, old times and all that. When's your next night off?"

"T-tomorrow," said Big Pete, all but stumbling over his own crossed boots.

"Come and have dinner with me at six o'clock," she said, her voice a satin Kreisler violin-tone of allure.

"Sure, I'll—" gulp— "be there, Tamara," said the embarrassed fireman.

THE following night, Larry Frayne sat again in the Christopher Street saloon, downing the ten-cent whiskey rather than the more festive two-for-a-quarter variety.

Until a high-helmeted policeman had threatened to run him in for loitering, he had patrolled the sidewalk across Irving Place from Tamara Jahnes' chic third-floor apartment.

The very thought that Tamara was entertaining Big Pete alone, caused green dragons to march up and down his spine and across his stomach. He had always thirsted madly for Tamara, even though she had made it plain, from childhood on, that she was not for the likes of him. He had always been her slave—an abject and devoted slave.

That she should go out with dudes like Mr. Damon seemed fitting and proper in the scheme of things. If such engagements did not make Larry wildly happy, they didn't make him unhappy either.

But the thought of her dining alone, in her flat, with Big Pete Wolachzewski, was something else again.

It made him burn with the bitter brew of jealousy, and turn to thoughts of vengeance.

Looking back over his thoroughly misspent life, Larry could hardly remember a time when Big Pete had not been in his hair. The big, clumsy dolt had somehow always managed to stumble right across the otherwise clear paths to success Larry had lined up for himself—first, as the block bully, later, as the Boys' Club boxing champion, more recently, as an up and coming arsonist.

His saving of Larry's life, in the powerhouse accident some nine months before, had merely piled more fuel on the flames of the arsonist's resentment. Larry had climbed to the top of the big generator to gain a vantage point from which to watch the fiery fruits of his labors in the shop next door. And if Big Pete had not spotted him and come blundering after him in a needless rescue attempt, neither man would have fallen into the live wires.

Neither Larry nor the Fire Department doctors understood why Big Pete had not been electrocuted. But the clumsy oaf's luck had been there as usual. And he had actually won the Department's hero medal for his feat. Not for the first time,

Larry wished fervently that it had been a posthumous award.

Now, thanks to the capriciousness of fate and a pair of handkerchiefs, the beauteous Tamara was entertaining him in the perfumed privacy of her Irving Place flat, seeking, she claimed, to put Pete off the scent with her charms. And, with Big Pete's incredible luck . . . Larry didn't see how the fireman could miss.

He ordered another shot of ten-cent whiskey and began to plot revenge for a betrayal he regarded as already a fait accompli.

Tomorrow night, while the neighborhood block party was under way, Big Pete would be on duty alone in the firehouse between the hours of nine o'clock and midnight. He had agreed to undertake the chore—Larry had learned this from neighborhood gossip that morning—in return for his voluptuous evening with the beauteous Tamara. Small payment for a night in heaven with Aphrodite.

The animal reactors inside Larry's skull, which served him for a brain, began to work with feral cunning as the pattern of his revenge took shape. What, he asked himself rhetorically, was the greatest humiliation that could happen to a fireman? The answer was easy . . . a fire in the firehouse, of course. If such a fire occurred in Engine House #513, while Big Pete was on duty alone,

the lout would never, never live it down.

It might even spell, ultimately, his dismissal from the Department. Larry smirked into the bar mirror. The big, sated tomcat, he thought. There would be no strings pulled in this bit of arson. It was going to be an all out job . . .

BIG Pete felt like anything but a sated tomcat as he tried vainly to flip greasy playing cards into a propped-up, inverted fireman's helmet in the rear of Engine House #513 the next evening. His inner sensations were a blend of disappointment, frustration and all-around self-distrust. The visit to the beauteous Tamara's apartment had proved something of a fiasco.

Not that he felt abashed over having dropped a tiny cloissené coffee cup after dinner. Tamara, he felt, ought to have realized such improperly small enamelware was simply unfitted for the grasp of his frankfurterlike fingers. Nor did the fact that, in endeavoring to retrieve this minor lapse, he had blundered into and splintered a nest of green Chinese tables, lie at the root of his misery.

From long experience, Big Pete had come to accept such mishaps as his portion.

And Tamara had been unexpectedly sweet about the wreckage—so sweet that his heart had begun

to pound in his temples, especially when, with the newly-made trash removed, she had turned down the lights.

Only, she said, to see if his ears really did shine in the dark.

To his amazement, they had. "That Larry!" he had moaned. And Tamara, after moving briefly to a front window, had disappeared into the bedroom, whence he had heard the soft, mellifluous flow of her voice over a telephone, calling the police. And, shortly afterward, his ears had ceased glowing.

But, for amorous purposes, the occasion was spoiled beyond repair. Within the hour, Big Pete had plodded homeward across Union Square, wishing fervently that he had never rescued Larry Frayne from the powerhouse. So far, the medal he had won for that achievement, had done nothing but gather dust in its satin-padded box.

And, for this, he had given up the joys of the block party. He could hear the blare of trombones and the distant throb of a bass drum through the brick walls of the Engine House, along with other sounds of festive jollity. As the queen of clubs veered inexplicably away from its target, he wished longingly for a fire.

At least, a fire would mean action.

He looked up at a sound of footsteps on the worn board floor, and saw Mr. Damon approaching.

Though Big Pete stood a little in awe of the fire buff's obvious attainments, he did not dislike the man. Along with the rest of the crew of Engine House #513, he had a hunch that, born under less fortunate circumstances, Mr. Damon would have made a good fireman.

Damon said, "Lonesome duty, Pete?"

Pete shook his head and said, "I asked for it—it's not so bad."

Damon smiled amiably and pulled back a flap of his satin-lined evening cape, revealing three quarts of McSorley's Cream Ale. He said, "Maybe these will help out a little."

"Gee, thanks, Mr. Damon," said Pete, touched by this solicitude toward his loneliness. "I'll get the glasses—they're upstairs."

"I'll come with you," said Damon. He grinned mischievously. "I've always wondered what it would be like to slide down the pole with an evening cape on."

Pete grinned back as he got to his feet, upsetting his chair, as usual. "Look out you don't catch it on the ceiling," he said. He led the way up the narrow staircase to the barracks room above.

USUALLY, Damon employed invisibility to cloak his exits and entrances from Engine House #513—for the building provided him with an exit and entryway to

his Southern realm, directly below. But on this occasion it hardly seemed worth-while.

The gleaming brass pole down which sleeping firemen, roused by an alarm, slid to the engine-house floor was his actual means of transportation. Damon had rigged a little device, well away from the pole itself on the upper story and carefully shielded from human gaze, which he could flick with the tip of his tail as he began his slide. It opened an unseen hole in the engine-room floor, through which he could slide on down an extension of the pole itself, alighting on a replica of Engine House #513, which had been carefully built, to his orders, in his own domain, along with a faithful reproduction of that part of Manhattan.

When queried as to the purpose of this replica of Earth, by the Big Chief during his last inspection visit, Damon had been at pains to explain that nowhere in any of the worlds had such a perfect Hell been conceived, either by man or demon.

Warming to his task, he had enlarged on the thesis. "Consider, sir," he had said, "how ideal is the arrangement. People work in constant misery and corruption at tasks they were never designed to do. They must toil in the noxious darkness of sewer and subway, or in sweatshop misery. When their





IT'S NOT THE HEAT

stint is done, they have neither the means nor the energy for enjoyment. At work, their eardrums are tormented by the throb of machines. At home, by the ceaseless squalling of infants and the strident voices of their parents' quarreling.

"To escape from such wretchedness, they must embrace corruption, which in turn entails unceasing fear of exposure. Their spiritual mentors, most of whom are my agents, tell them that all will be different with their passing—either better or worse, according to their deserts." He permitted himself a faint smile. "They are prepared for any change, would welcome any change. What is most unendurable for them is endless continuation of their misery."

The Big Chief had pondered his satrap's achievement briefly, then nodded approval. "You have done well, Arthenazeus," were his words. But then, "Remember, however, no fires. It is not the heat, but the humidity, that brings the ultimate in human torment."

Arthenazeus could hardly disagree with this dictum. But denying fire to demons was like telling angels they must travel in Stutz Bearcats instead of using their wings. It made for correctly wretched human souls—but it made for unhappy devils as well.

Mournfully, he considered the modernization of Hades while he flicked the invisible latch against

the baseboard with the tip of his invisible tail and slid down the slippery brass pole—his opera cape billowing about him like a balloonist's parachute—and, out of Big Pete's sight, right on down through the Engine House floor to the lowest Lower West Side.

BIG Pete smiled after his vanished benefactor and made his way down the stairs carefully so as not to stumble and shatter either of the thick tumblers he was carrying. When he emerged below, he noted with some puzzlement that Mr. Damon was not around, concluded that the fire buff, having done his good deed for Big Pete, had gone on about his private business.

He put the tumblers down on a coil of hose, from which they promptly rolled to crash in pieces on the floor. With a sigh at his classic ineptitude, Big Pete uncapped a bottle with his teeth and, draining the creamy brew, thought of a paraphrase of a fine old refrain—"Glorious, glorious! Three quarts of ale for the one of us . . ." He drank again, feeling at peace with his world.

By the time he had emptied the second quart, Big Pete began to feel a pleasant melancholy. He strolled across to the empty stalls and leaned against the worn and battered post that braced the outer end of one of the barriers between

two of them. He looked down into the yellow eyes of the firehouse cat and wondered if she missed the horses as much as he did just then.

That, he thought, was what happened to you for giving faithful service to mankind. Someone came along and invented a machine that could do the job better, and you were turned out to pull a fish wagon in your declining years. Machines were all very well, but they didn't even know what they were doing.

He wondered how many people knew what they were doing, and an extra loud blare of ragtime from the block party added to his loneliness. Dimly, he had an idea that Tamara Jahnes had her life plotted out precisely and was following her star to grandeur. He damned his ears for spoiling his chances, and stepped into the darkness of the empty stall, to peer closely at his murky image in a cracked mirror Mike McDonnell had put up there to ensure his pompadour before going out on dates.

He stared and gaped incredulously at his unexpectedly clear likeness. It was lit by the glow of his ears!

Larry Frayne! he thought and wondered what his nemesis was doing in the vicinity.

As if in answer, he heard a faint but unmistakable sound of activity on the floor.

For a moment he stood, frozen to statuedom. There could be no one upstairs—no one who had a right to be there. He himself had seen Mr. Damon slide down the pole. And he had been within easy watching distance of both doors and stairwell since coming down with the ill-fated glasses.

ANOTHER sound, this one a scraping noise, galvanized Big Pete into action. Unconscious of his native awkwardness, for once he was not awkward as he raced across the floor and up the stairs. When he emerged at the top, he was just in time to see Larry crouched over a contrivance of which a kerosene can and a twisted bit of blue cloth were the principal elements. Larry was in the process of striking a match to the cloth.

"So you're the bug, you her-ring!" he cried, overwhelmed with the realization of the origin of recent incendiary fires in the neighborhood.

Horried at being caught in the act, Larry gave vent to a ratlike squeak of terror. Instinctively aware that his sole hope lay in fleeing with the evidence, he gathered up the tools of his profession and, with one arm free, leaped for the brass pole, just as Big Pete made a frantic lunge for him.

A spot of brilliantine, spilled on the floor by Tony Malino while

readying himself for the block party, proved Big Pete's undoing. One of his metal-tipped heels inevitably made contact with the treacherous area and skidded abruptly, out of control. Big Pete's arms flailed like the proverbial windmills as he sought to regain his lost balance. He crashed into Mike McDonnel's cot, shattering it, sailed on past the brass pole-opening, into the wall. Just before he hit it, he felt his elbow crunch against an invisible snag by the baseboard.

The special doorway of Arthenazeus Daemon opened invisibly, just in time to pass the frantic Larry Frayne, then closed automatically as Big Pete, in frantic pursuit, came headfirst down the pole after him, to crack his noggin on the hardwood floor.

IN his panic, Larry Frayne barely noticed that the brass pole down which he was sliding was longer than any firehouse pole had a right to be. He picked himself up off the floor when at last he reached it, tucked his kerosene can under an elbow and prepared to continue his retreat from Engine House #513.

But poised briefly before resuming his flight, he became aware that all sounds of pursuit had vanished. A second before, the crashes from the barracks room above had sounded like the death charge of a

wounded water buffalo. Now, however, he heard nothing but the routine street noises from outside.

He used his free arm to wipe sudden perspiration from his face, then listened further, with a fiendish inspiration stirring in the murk of his mind. If Big Pete had knocked himself out . . .

With hope reborn, Larry looked quickly around for a source of added fuel, for the fire he might yet be able to set. His eyes lit on the big oil drums stacked against the far wall as a reserve supply for the new gas-driven truck. If he opened the bung of one of them, and arranged his wick just so, it would be a lot more sudden—and final—than any mere kerosene arson.

A lot more final for Big Pete too.

Lord! It was suddenly hot and humid! He could feel the sweat streaming down his back and stomach, inside his clothes, on his hands. He cursed the variability of the New York weather while he bent silently, expertly, to his heinous task. Finished, he ambled outside, seeking anonymity among passersby, all of whom seemed suddenly to be sweating and mopping their brows and growling at the humidity.

This, he thought, was really hellish weather. He was a good five blocks away when the underworld version of Engine House #513

blew up with a thoroughly satisfactory blast.

FROM a window of his comfortably non-humid office, in the top of a careful reproduction of the new Metropolitan Life Insurance tower, currently—as of 1912—Manhattan's loftiest skyscraper, Arthenazeus Daemon saw the explosion, watched the spread of the holocaust that followed and wondered, for once, what in Hell had happened. Conditioned as he was, through ten thousand lifetimes, to flames and smoke, he stood spellbound, watching the truly hellish spectacle, foreseeing the brilliant pattern of destruction to come, savoring the horror and panic among the lost souls that thronged the streets.

So enchanted was he by this unexpected diversion that his secretary—formerly employed in less decorous capacities by Abe Hummel, the notorious blackmailing attorney—had to call him three times to the interhades communicator. At the lift of his eyebrow, she made a face and whispered, "The Big Chief himself. And is he *hot*!"

Recalled to duty, Arthenazeus shivered slightly before picking up the instrument and saying into it, "Daemon here, Chief."

He promptly suffered a blistered ear. The Big Chief *was* hot . . . hotter by far than any fire conceived of by man *or* demon.

The list of Arthenazeus' crimes was ominous. Allowing an unclaimed soul into Hell to operate as a demon without license, permitting a fire which threatened to dry up the humidity and thereby defeat the purpose of the devil, failing to put out the fire promptly.

"But, Chief!" cried the harried Arthenazeus. "Frayne just blew up the only firehouse in Hell. How in heaven am I supposed to put it out?"

"I don't give an angel's third wing, but *do* it! And do it now!" Thus the Big Chief continued with true executive unreasonableness, "Furthermore, get that Frayne back where he belongs. We don't want him yet. He's too dangerous at this stage of the game."

"Yes, sir," replied the cowed Arthenazeus, "but I may have to call on the living for assistance. Is that okay?"

"I don't give a hoot in heaven how you handle it," was the rasping response. "The general humidity index in Hades is already down to ninety-eight per cent. In another hour, the climate will be bearable. Get moving!"

"I'm on my way right now, Chief," Arthenazeus replied, hanging up. He regarded his secretary abstractedly, for once unappreciative of her charms, and added, "Tell anyone who calls that I'll be back within a couple of hours."

"Yes, dear," she said obediently.

UP above, the crew of Engine House #513 returned from the block party, was in the process of trying to learn from a still groggy Big Pete what had knocked him unconscious when the alarm bell rang.

Big Pete, restored to full awareness by the gong, shook himself like some huge blond mastiff and moved toward the big red and white and gold engine. "Hey, fellows, that's us," he said.

"Yeah." Tony Malino climbed into the front seat beside him and took the wheel. "But where the devil is it? I don't know that eall."

Mike McDonnel was cranking the engine when Mr. Damon appeared, climbed aboard and made Tony move over, taking the wheel away from him. Mike barely had time to jump clear and swing himself onto the fire-step at the rear, so quickly did Mr. Damon get the big steam pump under way. Yet, somehow, none of them felt there was anything wrong about Mr. Damon's taking the wheel.

"Hang onto your hats, boys!" he called as he rolled her out to Tenth Street. "Here we go!"

They roared through the dark streets, cut left, skidded right, with reckless but expert daring, to the clang of the bell. Then, suddenly, they were racing down an inclined tunnel, a tunnel that wound and dipped inexplicably. Big Pete thought he knew a little about the





new subway construction in his native city—but he couldn't account for this tunnel. And he didn't have time to figure it out.

All at once, they were out of it and he heard Tony whistle in awe and shout, "Look at that! The whole damned city's on fire!"

That one engine and crew should be able to put such a conflagration out was obviously impossible—but so was the entire episode when viewed with detachment in retrospect. At the moment, there was simply no time to think. The boys got busy, and nothing had ever worked so perfectly for the heroes of Engine House #513 as did their operation against this appalling holocaust.

Water, squirted from their hose, nozzled with impossible power and accuracy, to quench impossible targets. They kept awaiting the arrival of other engines, of the hook and ladder boys, of the chemical wagons and emergency rescue crews. Yet, strangely, no other help arrived. Nor, as it turned out, was any help needed. Somehow, the boys of #513 managed to put it out by themselves.

BIG Pete stood in a charred and water-soaked doorway, looking at his work and finding it good. The humidity was killing him, and he opened his raincoat and removed his helmet to mop his streaming brow.

Mike McDonnel, standing beside him, said, "Hey, Pete, your ears."

They were shining in the restored darkness.

"I'll be . . . !" Big Pete exclaimed. "Larry Frayne!" And with the utterance of Larry's name, came full remembrance of what had happened in the frantic minutes before he had knocked himself out in pursuit of the arsonist. "The so-and-so tried to set fire to our Engine House," he cried. And, looking about him, he saw a furtive figure in a broken-brimmed cap slinking toward a corner.

Big Pete collared him in a half dozen giant strides, brought him back to the engine, cringing and whining his innocence.

"Innocent, my foot!" cried the outraged fireman. "You're sticking right with us until we find a cop."

The arsonist rode back with them through the tunnel, wedged tightly between Big Pete and Tony Malino on the broad front seat of the engine. Once he whined, "It wasn't me who set the fires—Tamura paid me to do it."

Big Pete backhanded him into silence, growling, "Trust you to hide behind a woman's skirt."

Larry subsided, sniveling, and Arthur Damon risked a curious glance at Big Pete. When they emerged from the upper end of the strange tunnel, he stopped the truck and prepared to slip down,

saying, "I'll be leaving you here, boys. Nice work."

"Better come to the station with us," said Big Pete. "You done a fine job yourself, Mr. Damon. We'd never have found the fire without you driving us."

"Thanks, Pete," said Damon with a smile. "But I have an engagement with a blonde who's been giving me trouble."

"A blonde . . . giving *you* trouble?" Big Pete found that hard to believe.

Damon laughed. "Yes, even I. You have no idea, Pete."

"What're you going to do about her?" Tony Malino asked.

Mr. Damon made a deprecatory gesture. "Not a great deal I can do at the moment, except to see that she's so placed that she can't cause any more trouble for a while." He dropped off the running-board to the street, lifted a hand in farewell. "Good night, men—good morning, rather."

He walked quickly around a corner and was gone, leaving the engine at the unfamiliar tunnel entrance.

Looking after him, Big Pete sighed and said, "To think a guy like him has troubles!"

"Yeah," said Tony, slipping into his usual place behind the wheel, "but he sure knows how to handle 'em." He got the big steam pump slowly under way through the deserted dawn-rosy streets.

AS they pulled into the Engine House, he said thoughtfully, "You know, there's something funny about all this. We just put out a big fire right in this part of town, right?"

"Yeah, that's right," replied Mike McDonnel.

"You see any signs of a fire when we come in just now?"

Mike looked startled. He said, "Hey!" He examined Big Pete's smoke-stained face, and Tony Malino's rubber coat, still dripping hose-water. He added, "And it was muggy there, and now it's cool."

"And another thing," said Tony, "that tunnel—where did it come from? There were a lot of other queer things about that job, when you think about it."

"Maybe we oughta shut up about it," said Mike.

"Where do you s'pose we been?" Big Pete asked. "I thought—"

"That's enough," said Mike. "We're back, ain't we? An' the fire's out. We better keep mum."

It was a scant five minutes later when the Deputy Commissioner arrived, flanked by high police officialdom. He said, "We've got evidence on those arson jobs—a bunch of witnesses have talked, and the man we want is Frayne. Anyone know where he is?"

"Yeah," said Big Pete, who was still wearing his helmet to hide the glow of his ears. "We just picked him up."

"Big Pete caught him red-handed," said Mike McDonnel.

"Good work," said the Deputy Commissioner. "Looks like you'll get another medal for this, Wolachzewski." Then, eying the smoke-grimed faces around him, "Where in Hell have you men been?"

Big Pete began, "Why we just got back from—"

"—from cleaning out the old coal cellar downstairs," Tony Malino cut in quickly.

"Fine," said the official, as Larry Frayne, still babbling his confession, was led away. Then, to Big Pete, "Why the helmet?"

"Because . . ." said Big Pete. Slowly he removed it, just as the police drove away with their catch. For a moment, his ears glowed brightly. Then, as Larry got further from the Engine House, their light faded out.

The Deputy Commissioner blinked and laughed uncertainly. "For a moment I thought . . ." he began. Then, with a shrug, "Guess my eyes are getting old. Well, it still looks like two medals for you, Wolachzewski. You're a hero, man. Don't go lousing it up with kid tricks."

"Nossir," said Pete. He promptly fell over the firehouse cat.



DOUBLE

DOUBLE WHAMMY

Two vignettes by the Vignette

Wizard himself ... hex enough all

by themselves without a blurb!

By FREDRIC BROWN



NATURALLY

HENRY BLODGETT looked at his wrist watch and saw that it was two o'clock in the morning. In despair, he slammed shut the textbook he'd been studying and let

Illustrated by STONE

his head sink onto his arms on the table in front of him. He knew he'd never pass that examination tomorrow; the more he studied geometry the less he understood it. Mathematics in general had always been difficult for him and now he was finding that geometry was impossible for him to learn.

And if he flunked it, he was through with college; he'd flunked three other courses in his first two years and another failure this year would, under college rules, cause automatic expulsion.

He wanted that college degree badly too, since it was indispensable for the career he'd chosen and worked toward. Only a miracle could save him now.

He sat up suddenly as an idea struck him. Why not try magic? The occult had always interested him. He had books on it and he'd often read the simple instructions on how to conjure up a demon and make it obey his will. Up to now, he'd always figured that it was a bit risky and so had never actually tried it. But this was an emergency and might be worth the slight risk. Only through black magic could he suddenly become an expert in a subject that had always been difficult for him.

From the shelf he quickly took out his best book on black magic, found the right page and refreshed his memory on the few simple things he had to do.

Enthusiastically, he cleared the floor by pushing the furniture against the walls. He drew the pentagram figure on the carpet with chalk and stepped inside it. He then said the incantations.

The demon was considerably more horrible than he had anticipated. But he mustered his courage and started to explain his dilemma. "I've always been poor at geometry," he began . . .

"You're telling *me*," said the demon gleefully.

Smiling flames, it came for him across the chalk lines of the useless hexagram Henry had drawn by mistake instead of the protecting pentagram.

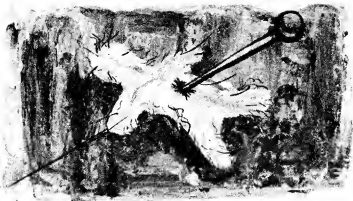
VOODOO

MR. DECKER'S wife had just returned from a trip to Haiti—a trip she had taken alone—to give them a cooling off period before they discussed a divorce.

It hadn't worked. Neither of them had cooled off in the slightest. In fact, they were finding now that they hated one another more than ever.

"Half," said Mrs. Decker firmly. "I'll not settle for anything less than half the money plus half of the property."

"Ridiculous!" said Mr. Decker. "Is it? I could have it all, you know. And quite easily, too. I



studied voodoo while in Haiti.”

“Rot!” said Mr. Decker.

“It isn’t. And you should be glad that I am a good woman for I could kill you quite easily if I wished. I would then have *all* the money and *all* the real estate, and without any fear of consequences. A death accomplished by voodoo can not be distinguished from a death by heart failure.”

“Rubbish!” said Mr. Decker.

“You think so? I have wax and a hatpin. Do you want to give me a tiny pinch of your hair or a fingernail clipping or two—that’s all I need—and let me show you?”

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Decker.

“Then why are you afraid to have me try? Since *I* know it works, I’ll make you a proposition. If it doesn’t kill you, I’ll give you a divorce and ask for nothing. If it does, I’ll get it all automatically.”

“Done!” said Mr. Decker. “Get

your wax and hatpin.” He glanced at his fingernails. “Pretty short. I’ll give you a bit of hair.”

When he came back with a few short strands of hair in the lid of an aspirin tin, Mrs. Decker had already started softening the wax. She kneaded the hair into it, then shaped it into the rough effigy of a human being.

“You’ll be sorry,” she said, and thrust the hatpin into the chest of the wax figure.

Mr. Decker was surprised, but he was more pleased than sorry. He had not believed in voodoo, but being a cautious man he never took chances.

Besides, it had always irritated him that his wife so seldom cleaned her hairbrush.

Ludric Brown

See Me in Black

*How did the stranger know so much
about Hickman? Then Hickman
found out—and wished he hadn't!*

By ROBERT BEINE

Illustrated by BECK

IT was at 10:04, on the morning of December 28th, that the man in black walked into Daniel Hickman's life, a man of most unusual aspect, at once ludicrous and appalling—a man you would do well to remember.

Dan Hickman was a pleasant young man, bright and glib, a good

salesman, a Buyer-to-be (shirts and ties) for Hasker's, just off Broadway.

On this particular morning, Dan was bored and sleepy. By ten o'clock, he'd had only two sales—a "clearance" shirt and a two-buck tie. Now, he stared through the doorway at the whirl-

ing gusts of snow that broke funnel-like in the narrow window lobby of the store, idly pondering the challenge of the storm to his mid-morning appetite for coffee and toast.

Occasionally, a huddled, coat-heavy pedestrian would swerve into the lobbyway, pause, shaking and stamping, and then push resolutely back onto the street. But no one bothered to look into their big window, now mockingly dated with its huge, avuncular Santa.

After some few moments, Dan turned and walked back to his counter. He picked up his salesbook, glumly flipped the pages, laid the book aside again, then dropped to his knees behind the counter and sorted through the bottom row of ties, the two-dollar line.

AND then it happened.

Even while he was stooped behind the counter, Dan knew that someone was looking at him. Rather, looking *for* him, since he was completely hidden behind the counter.

He straightened quickly, puzzled to see no one standing before him. Then his eyes, turning to the doorway, widened suddenly.

A man stood looking at him, surprise and recognition in his expression. A man Dan never had seen before.

Dan dropped his eyes instantly, embarrassed by the intimate directness of the man's gaze. The stranger's image hung startlingly bold in his mind. The man was dressed entirely in black—hat, coat, shoes, muffler, even gloves. That in itself was not so remarkable, but the man had an extraordinary pallor, a sick-room whiteness that struck a fearsome contrast with the unrelieved blackness of his clothing.

The stranger's face was almost lost in the whiteness. Stranger? Yes, definitely a stranger.

"Dan? Dan Hickman?"

Dan looked up.

There he was, smiling a hideous greeting, a man he had never seen before.

"Why, yes, I'm Dan—"

"Dan Hickman," the man repeated. "You're a long way from home."

Dan looked at the man. He had quite a face—with its long, even nose, high, almost sacred cheekbones, almost no eyebrows, and eyes, black—by God—black eyes, pitted in the white clay of his flesh. The face looked about forty years old.

Dan knew he could never have forgotten this face. The man was definitely a stranger, a stranger who knew his name was Dan Hickman, that he was, indeed, a long way from home.

The man proffered his hand,

chuckling. "I never expected to see you in New York, Dan!"

Mutual, Dan thought, desperately searching his memory for some clue to the man's identity. He decided that his odd visitor had him confused with another Dan Hickman and was about to suggest a coincidence when the man asked, frowning, "How is your family, Dan?"

"All right, thank you," Dan said hesitantly. "Mother was operated—"

"Yes, I knew of that. She's on her feet now?"

"Yes." Who *was* he?

"And your dad?" the stranger asked, his smile working again. "Still with the Joplin school board?"

A friend, then.

"Yes," Dan laughed, "no one dares suggest retirement around our house. He still thinks he's indispensable—"

"Does Bernice still call you 'birdie'?"

Dan blinked, startled. Impossible. No one but close friends and his family knew of this dreaded intimacy—his sister's childhood taunt.

THE man was chuckling again, his black eyes fastened on Dan, his hands folding and unfolding like long white spiders on the top of the counter. "If you two weren't . . ." the man continued, trail-

ing off into a clacking laugh that made Dan shudder with embarrassment. "How long have you been in New York, Dan?"

"About a year and a half," Dan said, unable to meet the stranger's gaze. "Are you living in New York?"

"Just passing through! Have to leave tomorrow, in fact. Back home for me!"

"Oh," Dan nodded vaguely. "Back to . . .?"

". . . the same old place! Oh, yes!"

Abbott and Costello, Dan thought, trying to remember which one was Abbott.

"Well, I'm glad to see you've got a nice job, Dan," the man said, tilting his gaze along the wall. "Say—what time do you get through here?"

The question hung like a threat.

"Oh, about six," Dan said ineptly. "But it—"

"Wonderful! Then you'll have dinner with me!"

Ass, ass! Dan cursed himself. He braced himself for the kiss-off. "I'm sorry, Mr.—ah—but the truth is, I can't remem—"

"You're not busy for dinner?" Blue lines of disappointment appeared suddenly in the white face.

"Well, not exactly," Dan began nervously, "but the truth is—"

"Then you'll come! As my guest, of course, Dan! What a marvelous break this has been—"

my finding you here in the middle of New York City. I know a little place—in the lower part of town—we'll have a quick dinner and you can hurry right along if you have things to do!"

"Well, that's very nice of you, sir, but I don't think—"

"Nonsense! I want to do it! I'll meet you here at six. All right?"

"All right," Dan said, defeated, adding unnecessarily, "if you insist."

DAN looked at himself in the mirror over the counter, hating himself, people in black clothes and the cup of watery coffee he was drinking. He sternly reviewed his "meeting" with the man in black, but the absurdity of the conversation gave the whole situation a silly, dreamlike inconsistency. He wondered for a moment if he weren't the victim of some fabulously impractical joke. But in that case, he reasoned dismally, it would have to have been an imported joke.

No one, certainly, in New York knew about his nickname, "birdie"—except probably Bill Cooper, his best friend. The man obviously knew him and knew him well. He was stuck, and it was his own damn fault. He should have spoken up in the beginning, professed his ignorance—or rudeness, as it was—and admitted that he didn't know his visitor.

Now he'd best try to bluff the evening through, catch or determine the man's identity if he could, conduct himself gracefully if he couldn't. But oh, God! what did you call a "stranger" who apparently has known you from the crib? *Mister? Sir? This is a dandy little place, mister! Say, boy, this is some steak! Yes, sir! Yessiryes-sir.*

Dan threw a dime on the counter, dug his arms into the sleeves of his storm coat and shuffled miserably out into the storm and across the street to the store . . .

"There's a note for you in your book, Dan!" Mr. Treddup, the store manager, called from the back of the store when Dan had hung up his coat. "Some fellow called. About two minutes ago."

"Thanks, Mr. Treddup!" Dan said, waving. He moved to his counter and picked up a yellow slip with the message, *Call Cooper.*

WITH a small stir of excitement, Dan hurried to the phone in the stock room. Maybe Cooper had something lined up for the evening, some dark little intrigue with girls, that would salvage the later hours of a doomed dinner.

"DeWitt Airlines," announced a tinny voice at the other end of the line.

"Mr. Cooper, please," Dan said and waited.



SEE ME IN BLACK

"Yes?" a deeper voice inquired after a moment.

"No."

"No what, my simple friend?"

"No, I won't tell you my secret of eternal youth."

"I already know it—sleep. Listen, I didn't call you for secrets or advice, I've got a neat proposition."

"Shoot!"

"My folks are going to be in town this weekend."

"Hey, that's wonderful. When'll they—"

"Lemme finish! For some obscure reason, they'd like to see you. In fact, they insist that I ask you out. Saturday night. Dinner, drinks, the works. We'll probably be going to a fairly nice spot, so wear your socks."

"Okay, buster, I'll even shave! What's new with them?"

"I'll let them tell you. Incidentally, your mother sent along a few things with them—towels, sheets and fluffy slippers to keep your darling feet warm. Said to be sure to tell you that your dad bowled 243. Also, you're supposed to write."

"I never left home," Dan said, feeling wonderful. "Hey, what's the deal then for Saturday night? Do I meet you?"

"We'll pick you up at your place. About eight. And, please, send the girls away before we get there."

"All right, old man. Sounds good."

"Good."

"Stay clean."

"Clean."

Dan hung up. He felt great. A weekend with the Coopers, his favorite people. He began to whistle. Then he remembered his date with the man in black and all joy left him.

THE 905 Club was a surprise.

Dan had been expecting a paper-doiled tea room, filled with nondescript, respectable men and dusty, aging widows. Pocketing his claim check, he looked through the archway into the bluish haze of a mirrored lounge, busy and exciting with the intimate buzz of cocktailers. His glance measured a covey of unattached girls at the bar, all of them astonishingly pretty in the dim light. He was in the process of making a mental note of the location of the place when he felt a touch on his sleeve and turned to find his nameless host, a smiling shadow in the blue fringe of the bar's light.

"Shall we?" the pale man suggested and the two of them worked their way between crowded tables to a small table in the dining area of the lounge.

For a moment after they were seated, they took separate measure of the room. The bar itself was not huge—a neat, blond-wood

horseshoe counter—but cocktail drinkers were standing between the stools, adding their noise to the sounding activity of the room. The two men turned to the sudden shadow of the waitress.

"A drink, Dan?" asked the man in black.

Dan hesitated, smiling. "Well, it might take some of the sting out of that wind."

And some of the gloom out of this meeting, he added to himself. On their way over in the cab, Dan had said very little—a few guardedly inquiring comments which failed to elicit the man's identity. He lived, or had lived, in Joplin. That was all Dan knew.

"A martini, then?"

"Fine," Dan said, adding belatedly, "are you having one?"

"Why, yes," the man said, clasping long fingers together on the table. "Two martinis."

While they were waiting for their drinks, the pale stranger spoke quietly of "home"—friends, neighborhoods, country that Dan knew well. The drinks came and Dan turned gratefully to his glass.

He was vaguely conscious of the man's persistent stare, but managed to convince himself that he didn't give a damn. *Funny duck*, he thought, as the gin started its thaw of his wind-reddened face and limbs. *A nice enough guy—quiet, gentle, embarrassingly sincere.*

But something was *wrong* about him, something more than his funereal aspect. The man impressed Dan with his loneliness—really an emptiness, left by disappointment or, perhaps, by tragedy. At certain times, Dan would find himself catching at certain phrases or intonations in the man's speech that stirred familiar echoes in the halls of his memory. *There! I do know him! I've heard that voice before!* But, upon looking again at the thin, pale face, Dan knew with uneasy conviction that he could never have known this man.

They finished their drinks, ordered another pair, and Dan relaxed with an inner shrug. So he didn't know the man—he could still enjoy himself, couldn't he? Fine drink, yessir, fine drink. They drank.

EARLY in his fourth martini, Dan suspected he was drunk. He was not disturbed by the realization — rather, surprised and pleased. He contemplated saying to the man, "Say, Blackie, just who the hell are you? What's with the midnight suit?" Or maybe, "Spider." Spider was better than Blackie. "What's the trouble, Spider? Do you need sex or sunshine?" Somebody giggled and Dan recognized his own voice. The giggle soared suddenly into a shrill scale of laughter—then into a violent fit of coughing, which left

him shaken and tearful, clutching his half-spilled drink.

"'M sorry," he mumbled without looking up. He reached for his napkin and dabbed his eyes and mouth before trusting himself to look up again. The man was looking at him, his half-smile reassuring. Dan opened his mouth to speak, but held his words as he saw the other man's lips move.

"We're having fun, aren't we, Dan?" the man said in a low voice. He raised his martini and Dan joined him, draining his glass.

From that point on, things became wretchedly confused for Dan. At one remembered moment, he discovered an empty plate in front of him with no recollection of having eaten. At another, he found himself by the bar, drinking something stinging hot from a small glass. He turned his head slowly—the move seemed to take forever—and found his unknown friend sitting beside him, nodding and smiling his ghostly smile.

Time was acting funny, too. First it would freeze, strangling sound and motion for an eternal, displaced second. Then it would jerk rudely forward, and Dan would find himself anticipating small noises and scraps of conversation in the half-second before they reached his ears. And then, suddenly, they were on the street, the two of them, the younger man weaving dangerously on the curb,

his companion dark and silent by the street light.

DAN stood by the curb for several seconds, lost in a bright, anonymous haze of lights and voices. Presently, however, the slicing wind cut through the fog of his drunkenness and he turned, with clearing vision, to see the man in black a few feet behind him.

"'Fraid I got li'l high," Dan said slowly, straightening his back against the wind. "'M awf'l sorry, Mr. Black." Instantly he realized his slip and started to compose an apology, but the man had taken his arm firmly at the elbow and was leading him to the corner.

"'M all right . . ." Dan mumbled, drawing his arm away with drunken dignity. The next moment, one foot was skidding and he found himself genuflecting in a snow bank. He rose again quickly, brushing himself, and walked the few steps unsteadily to his companion's side.

" . . . cap at my place."

"What?" Dan screamed into the high wind.

"How about a nightcap at my room?"

As soon as Dan had put the words together in his own mind, he nodded thoughtfully. "'S nice idea."

There was a cab ride, then a long flight of stairs—parts of each Dan could remember. He was sur-

prised, however, to find himself seated in a huge leather chair, in a room he had never seen before—and could only partially see now. The room was silent and Dan leaned forward stupidly, trying to see beyond the silver haze of his drunkenness.

The next moment, he fell sharply back against the cushion, dizzy in a spinning, sickening way. He blinked several times, but his eyes refused to focus. Suddenly, he became conscious of a slow, silent movement beyond the liquid circle of his vision. "Whoosair?" he hooted to the unseen walls and, for an instant the silence in the room was infinite.

And then, as if a curtain of nightmare had been drawn suddenly aside, the room cleared shockingly to Dan's straining eyes. He saw the man standing before him, his arms raised imperiously in front of his chest, one hand performing a delicate but terrifyingly deliberate circular movement, the other holding a long, silken, formless *something* that became nothing as the walls turned to flashing mirrors. Then Dan was falling backward into a whirling, glowing rush of silence, backward, it seemed, through time itself, into a sudden, splintering whiteness and a final crush of some dark, enraged force that tore the bright fragment of memory from Dan's agonized mind.

HE awoke with a start, then closed his eyes quickly, waiting for the shock of daylight to announce his hangover. When nothing happened, he tilted his head slowly back upon the top of the chair and opened his eyes with great deliberateness. He stared at the ceiling for several seconds, trying to organize his thoughts. Gradually, they attained form. He jerked forward as the memory of the man in black touched some inner nerve.

The room was empty.

Empty and unused, Dan observed, staring around at the dull brown walls, thick with dust and cobwebs, at the unmade bed.

A moth caught his eye at the window and, as his focus shifted to the street beyond, he saw with great relief the familiar towering clock of a downtown bank. He was only a few blocks from work! And over an hour late! He jumped to his feet.

The next moment he almost fainted.

He stared at his feet, a fist of panic tightening in his stomach. *His shoes were black! His trousers were black!* Not the navy blue of his regular suit—*black*. The rest of his outfit—shirt, tie, socks—he had seen only once before. On the strange man from nowhere.

Dan turned and rushed over to the closet. He found what he half-suspected would be there — two

coats, a suit coat and an overcoat. Both black. And without labels.

A quick search in the pockets of the coats produced nothing except — oddly — two twenty-dollar bills. Dan frowned, forcing a swallow past his throat. His theory of robbery was shot. He'd had only eleven dollars when he left the office the night before.

Already, a new theory was beginning to form in his mind, a theory so fantastic and involved that, for a moment, he refused to acknowledge it. Still, it seemed the only explanation for the extraordinary deception. The man in black was in trouble, a marked man—or, perhaps, he was trying to get away from someone. This would account for his evasiveness the night before. He needed a new identity, new papers—driver's license, personal cards, everything. And, of course, different clothes. Why not acquire them all in one easy operation?

Get a fellow drunk and rob him right down to his skin. First, though, learn something about him, lure him into confidence, then get him blind in some dingy hotel room and pull the switch. In New York City, no one would know there were two Dan Hickmans walking around. There were big question marks in the theory, to be sure. Why should Mr. X bother to dress his victim after

the switch? But then, the guy was a little mad anyway—Dan had sensed instability from his first startled glimpse of the man. The man was sly—but mad.

Dan felt a powerful urge to get out of the room. He stepped quickly to the door and, without looking back, moved into the short, narrow hallway that led to the stairs. He started down the steps, then grasped the rail for balance as a sudden rising vertigo washed coldly through him. It was a strange feeling, like falling into a great swallowing emptiness. He was shaking slightly, as he continued down the stairs and then outside.

ALTHOUGH the sky had lightened considerably, there was still a great deal of snow in the air, hurled by the wind in bold, stinging sweeps. Dan made his way to the corner, heading for the store. Halfway across the street he collided with a small hunched figure and, looking down through the peppering snow, he saw an old woman, gray-faced, incredibly wrinkled. "Keep your head up!" he mumbled and pushed on, wondering what in hell an old woman would be doing out in the storm.

He quickened his pace in the next block, anxious to get to the store and describe his misadventure.

Then something happened.

It was too slight to notice at

first—a mere flutter in his mind, then a whisper, then a warning, burgeoning suddenly into terror—a spontaneous terror he had never known before. He was seized by something he could not identify, something like the panic of being followed on a dark street.

Instinctively, he looked over his shoulder, seeing nothing, but there was still terror in his mind. He began to run with the speed of desperation at first, finally in agonized breathless pain as he reached the corner near the store. He stopped only a moment, fighting for each burning breath of snow, his head pounding savagely. And then he was running again, not understanding why he ran, knowing only that he had to reach the safety of friends.

He steadied himself against the street window as he reached the store, half-stumbling into the narrow lobby. For a moment, he thought he was going to pass out. His chin dropped down to his chest. He stood a moment longer, resting against the side window. Then he walked to the door and reached for the knob.

The icy sting of the brass against his palm was the only thing that kept him on his feet. As he stared at the horror confronting him on the other side of the glass door, his only conscious impression was the cold burning of his hand.

For there, standing behind his counter, sorting his ties, was himself—the face he saw in the mirror each day—the hair, the ears, the smile, the awkward, slightly stooped posture—and, of course, his clothes. Himself. This, then, was his terror.

Even before he turned to the black mirror siding of the doorway, Dan knew what he was going to see—a hollow face with a long even nose, eyes, black with a timeless, inner rage, skin so white it belonged to the grave. It was all there and, as Dan looked into the lifeless eyes, he knew the secret of the black rage. He was in a body without a soul.

He didn't question the source or certainty of his revelation. This was truth, absolute truth like instinct. He was trapped in a *shell*, an accident of nature—or a product of unspeakable sin—doomed to walk the eternity of an endless day, without hope or redemption.

DAN moved with short steps toward the street, holding his forehead awkwardly as he went, as if the slight, familiar pressure of his fingers might keep the wild claws of his panic from tearing away his mind. What would happen? What did this body *do*? Did it know pain? Or anything else *but* pain? What would the—end—bring?

A THOUGHT came from out of nowhere.

Surely, *love* could conquer the evil of his being! Love and faith. He seized the thought, hope surging in his chest.

But . . .

Was he *capable* of love and faith—now?

Yes! shouted in his mind. The very fact that he could *think* of love and faith—conceive such a hope—proved him still capable of realizing goodness.

His thought soared. He had to find friends, quickly, someone who would listen to his story, who would believe him, understand how he had been victimized. Someone who would pledge faith—and help.

The answer came at once—Cooper.

Dan ran into the street, paused a moment, looking about, then hurried to the near corner where a cab stood idling. "DeWitt Airlines!" he called to the driver and dropped into the back seat.

Dan leaned back and closed his eyes, fighting to clear his mind for the difficult scene ahead. The next moment, it seemed, the cab had stopped, and he was moving across the sidewalk toward the long, modernistic offices of De-

Witt Airlines, where his friend Bill Cooper worked.

His heart throbbing in his throat, Dan pushed open the all-glass doorway and stepped into the ticket office. A number of young women poked solemnly at their typewriters beyond the counter, undisturbed by the large, swinging mobile immediately above them. Dan glanced about the room, stiffening with nervous dread as he saw a tall, blond young man move back from one of the lower files on the far wall.

"Cooper!"

The tall young man swung sharply around, a frown biting his eyes as he caught sight of the figure in front of the counter. His glance shifted to the doorway, then back to the lone figure. Finally, he moved forward with a long stride, his head tilted inquiringly.

"Bill Cooper," Dan said, and suddenly he knew everything, and he wanted to laugh like mad and tell his friend what a hell of a world it was. Instead, he concealed his mirth behind a frown and said, "Bill Cooper—you're a long way from home!"

Robert F. Beane

KASH and the Lemurs

By RALPH SPENCER

Anything can happen

in sunny California . . .

Even a revolt of the weather!

Illustrated by TONEY

WHEN the message came from his Aunt Jane in Carmel, George Rogers was trying to write script for his *Homestead Homilies* time on radio station KASH — *Scintillating Sundries about Your Sunny Santa Garras Home Site*.

Half an hour in front of the microphone at the "Realtors' Own Station, KASH," and, hitherto, a couple of hours a day typing up a script, provided him with a modest

living. Hitherto. Not so now.

It was getting harder to write scripts. Ordinarily, the climate was good for a few minutes talk that made all who had bought "an acre of prunes — or grapes — and independence," feel as though they were full of their own produce, fermented.

But today, how could you compare the dreary, snow-clad East with sunny California, if California not only had no sun this

winter, but had floods, hail and tornadoes to boot? Houses were collapsing over washed-out foundations in the towns, earthslides blocked highways, autos bogged down and filled with silt on the finest roads in the world, sir—and so on.

Out to do his regular shopping this day, George had passed a group of the realtors on the corner, talking blasphemy. They said there had been a “sn-w st-rm” in the hills back of town.

NOW, when Los Angeles was confounded by a White Christmas, something could still be saved. George could make copy of it. He was supposed to discourage immigration into other parts of the state—gently, with artful gibe, but *nothing implausible*, and also, emphatically, nothing you could be sued for. It was his task to entice tourists and investors, particularly retired Middle Westerners due to become “accounts” in some real estate office, away from Los Angeles—“Where anything can happen”—to salubrious Santa Garras.

But what to write now, if “sn-w” had fallen here? It never had before, since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, in either LA or Santa Garras—but this was the most unusual weather.

George’s commentary must always be sweetened with lovable

reminiscences of the pioneers—like Joaquin Murieta’s spurs. This bandit of the Gold Rush days had operated in the Sierra Nevadas mostly, and every contented home owner back there had found on his land a spur lost by Joaquin Murieta. George spoofed the people across the state by an actual count of 1561 of Joaquin Murieta’s spurs now in private collections.

On the other hand, in the hills close to Santa Garras, there actually was an authentic ruined stronghold of dashing brigands of the “days of old, the days of gold”—robbers who, like the people buying prune or vineyard land there, were thrifty folk who did not sow the terrain with spurs!

George had, in his latter day emergency, moved the scene of the rare discoveries of diamonds in California from the Sierras to the Coast Range, by describing the search for them by a band of Santa Garras boys. He avoided mentioning that the boys found no sparkling gems, but shifted easily into a catalogue, stone by stone, of the California diamond collection in the Ferry Building, San Francisco, not obtruding the fact that they were all found in or near the Sierra Nevadas.

It was all good, legitimate real estate promotion.

Desperate, of late, he had even run close to the limits of the libel

law, by relating a series of mysterious disappearances in the barrens around Mt. Wilson, outside of LA—"where anything can happen"—and hinting that the poverty-stricken residents there were now engaged in trapping tourists for purposes of cannibalism.

But even so, the supply of scintillating sundries useful to the realtors of the Santa Garras Valley was running out.

IN fact, George was sitting in front of a blank paper in his typewriter and feeling pretty discouraged, when Aunt Jane's telegram was handed to him.

"Wonderful story for you," the message read. "Have arranged interview with Lemur tonight."

Well, George had always thought Aunt Jane was just a little daffy, but she had occasionally given him some good tips. He looked at his watch—he could make it easily before deadline time. He grabbed his hat, scowled at the window, snatched a raincoat and started for the door. He stopped just long enough to pick up a dictionary and thumb the pages. The result left him mystified. "Lemur," the dictionary recorded, "an arboreal, chiefly nocturnal mammal, with foxlike face and very large eyes . . ."

It didn't make sense, but sense was not an absolute prerequisite in George's business, or even in the

real estate business, he reflected, and Aunt Jane did have a good nose for news.

George dropped the dictionary and was soon in his Ford, detouring landslides across the road to Carmel. He shuddered at each of them. There were never so many landslides before this year's unusual weather. He kept his eyes away from the tops of the hills for fear he might see some "sn-w." If things went on like this, station KASH would have to close down because all the realtors would be bankrupt.

He got a moment's satisfaction as he passed through a town and noted the uncompromisingly Anglo-Saxon name on the railroad station signboard. He remembered when the place was called Pajaro, and people were proud of its Spanish name. But then Middle Westerners who had complied with their manifest destiny by reading high geared advertisements of the realtors of Pajaro about prunes, vines and independence in old age, had heard the conductor on their train—a local boy who knew the Spanish names of all the towns—yell out "*Pah-ha-ro,*" and had gone right on to Monterey and its realtors, because these prospective accounts were listening for some place called Pu-JAR-o. Well, the local people had seen their duty and had done it. No mere sentiment could stand in the way

of good business and prosperity.

George smiled at this fast, clean, aggressive salesmanship, though he felt no partisanship for it. Station KASH depended on the realtors of this whole part of the country for its income—clear to Carmel even—and his fortunes were bound up with the station. He had given it his best efforts and, by his advice, they had the liveliest popular records, with nothing highbrow to irk the accounts. George had handled some of the negotiations by which KASH broadcast for an hour a day that sturdy serial, *The Prospersons and their Progeny*, now in the forty-ninth chapter of its hundredth book.

But things looked bad. George was both worried and hopeful as he rolled into his Aunt Jane's backyard in Carmel.

AUNT Jane met him at the door with her finger across her lips. "Sh-h-h," she said. "Don't wake him up, he's traveling in his astral body. Dinner's ready and he'll be out soon."

George wondered whether a Lemur's fox-face carried over onto his astral body, but he didn't stop to ask. Aunt Jane, like almost everybody else in California, the Beautiful, had come from the East for her independence, but she had come from New England and her boiled dinners were an ever pleasant anticipation for her nephew.

However, when they were seated at the table, George missed something. He missed the boiled dinner. Most of the ingredients were there, but raw. Raw potatoes, peeled but raw onions, turnips and carrots. Everything but the corned beef. Also, there were side dishes of shredded cabbage, lettuce and plates of shelled nuts. No meat at all. No tea, no coffee.

"What kind of freak have you for a boarder now?" George asked. Aunt Jane always set the same table for herself that she spread for her boarders, as a measure of economy.

"Here I am now," said a mild voice from the doorway to the rented rooms.

What the astonished George at first thought was a naked man came in calmly and approached the table. Then George saw he wasn't quite naked, but was wearing diapers. He had another didie tied around his head. He had long, straight hair to his shoulders and a long flaxen beard. He was not Mahatma Gandhi, George decided, because, first of all, Gandhi was dead, though that did not necessarily settle the matter in California. Secondly, and more definitely, because this man was a blond.

"The Yogi," Aunt Jane introduced them. "My nephew, George. The Yogi eats only unfired foods—vegetables, you know."



"Are you a Lemur?" George asked, after a silence broken only by the Yogi's crunching on celery.

"Oh, *he* isn't!" Aunt Jane answered for him. "He met the Lemurs while he was traveling in his astral body a few days ago. They make the lights that dance on hills back of Carmel at night."

"Lemurians," corrected the Yogi, sadly. "Refugees on the astral plane from the sunken continent, Lemuria."

So that was explained, at least. The Lemurians, presumably, did not have fox-faces. The Yogi's face was also perfectly innocent in appearance, even dreamy.

BUT, if George was to make any kind of scintillating commentary about Lemurs—no, Lemurians—he needed a few more details. "What else do they do?" he inquired.

"They control the climate," said the Yogi, in a matter-of-fact manner. "And they wish to be agreeable to people," he added after another carrot. "Their vibrations require an atmosphere of soothing contentment."

"Nobody is contented with this most unusual weather," George ventured.

"That's why they wish to consult you," said the Yogi. He finished all the raw vegetables within easy reach and rose. "Shall we go up into the hills?"

Aunt Jane bundled them out delightedly. There were a few people on the street, but at first they paid little attention to the Yogi's undress. Nothing in that line surprises those who live in Carmel, George reflected, until he found himself with some difficulty breaking away from one of the local realtors. The man had rushed up to congratulate the Yogi on his public spirit which by his garb, displayed a confidence in the sunny, salubrious, satisfying California climate—in spite of the present most unusual . . .

Darkness was settling as the Yogi silently, but unerringly, led George up past the mission and onto a brush-covered hill.

"I've brought George," said the Yogi, lifting his face in the direction of a low-lying cloud, or perhaps a fog bank.

George was somewhat concerned when he saw scaly wings flap from the cloud, and a gigantic serpentlike form settle on the hill. A mouth with enormous fangs and barbels like those of a magnified catfish opened in front of him, and a blast of furnace heat issued, with smoke and some fire, as the dragon—for that was what George now realised it was—murmured in a well-modulated, even musical voice, "Will you tilt?"

The Yogi muttered something about being late for an appointment with the Guru Hoo Tannie

on the Buddhic plane and strolled down the hillside, leaving George alone with the dragon.

"Which way should I tilt?" George asked. He did not exactly understand the turn the conversation seemed to be taking, but he had once been told by his friend, a police detective, that at first you let the respondent tell his own story. "You never know what lead will come up," the detective had said. George, after his recent experiences, was in a mood for anything explanatory.

THE dragon seemed annoyed. "I *do* try to be agreeable to people," he said, "but where's your charger, your lance, shield or sword?"

"Well, I wasn't prepared for this . . ." George began.

"Don't I hear every night on the KASH broadcast, when they introduce you, that you are the realtors' champion who will now tilt at the windmills that whirl in the heads of the Angelenos?"

"Oh," George interrupted him. "That's merely my build-up." He explained what the introduction meant.

The dragon chuckled, turning his head a little aside so the gout of flame would not give George an involuntary non-barber's singe.

"My mistake," he said. "I thought you were another of King Arthur's knights. I used to become

a dragon to amuse them—nothing they liked better than to tilt at dragons. When they were tired of the exercise, I simply vanished, and they went home to boast about it for years. They always said they killed the dragon." He chuckled again, and his breath set the top of a eucalyptus tree on fire, in spite of its rain-soaked condition. The dragon casually lifted a claw the size of a house and snubbed out the tree like a cigarette.

"You mean that's all there is to those ancient legends about St. George. . . ?" began George.

"Yes," said the dragon. "You'll pardon me for mixing the two Georges. And the language! You use the word 'ancient.' But we Lemurians are really so ancient that we fall into the sloppy habit of regarding anything you can count in thousands of years as practically contemporaneous." His baleful breath lighted up the hillside and revealed a green and purple skin. Each of the spines that lined his back resembled the Campanile in Berkeley.

"I can hardly believe this," George demurred.

"Well, none of those legends ever said anything about bringing home a dragon-skin, did they?" asked the dragon, still amused. "And you never saw any dragon-bones, did you?"

"So you're the Lemur," said George. "Why haven't we seen

you before? How does a great big repti—I mean, such a nobly proportioned being as an—er—Lemurian keep out of sight?"

"Oh," answered the dragon. "Lemurians are invisible, ordinarily, but we can materialize in any form. We are the dancing lights that amuse Aunt Jane and other old ladies. Sometimes we are penitents who occupy the attention of the monks there below. I've often been a retired Iowa farmer to please the realtors. But always something alive, nothing mechanical. We can't become radio stations. If we could, we would drown out all those programs you give us, and everything would be all right. We do try to keep people contented and we've made the climate here something they boast about."

"Not lately," objected George.

"That's because we are all sick. It's the modulation on those radio waves! Electromagnetic waves permeate our astral bodies. We're jangled and torn and pestered all day and half of every night with the music you play! And those commercials! That horrible jingle about Rubaduba Suds! You've got to stop it!"

LIGHTNING crackled out of the dragon-smoke wreaths, that probably looked like a rain cloud to Carmel, George presumed. Very likely, the inhabitants

were rushing to buy umbrellas in fear of more unusual weather.

"I see your point," George agreed. He mused on some of his own dislikes. "How would you like to stop *The Prosperous and their Progeny*? I helped to start it here, but I never knew it would run on so long."

"Fellow sufferer," said the dragon. "Now you see how it is. I'd like to end it, but my wife got interested in it about twenty years ago, and she says that when it has run another thirty years or so it will have given her a moment's relaxation. Most of us are relaxed and soothed by some of the music composed recently by a couple of young fellows named Haydn and Bach. Cut out all the rest of the stuff."

"How in the world am I going to do that?" George asked.

The dragon snorted irritably, and the blaze from his nostrils started brush and grass fires over three hills back of Carmel.

"Look what you've made me do!" cried the dragon peevishly. "Now there will be fire whistles and fire engines clanging and hooting all sorts of uneasiness. Oh, my vibrations—it's starting already! I must dematerialize, and you're going to have rain, thunder, lightning, hail and maybe earthquakes. When we're driven into a frenzy this way, we simply can't control the climate, and we don't want to.

Br-r-r-rth!" he burst out in the most discordant Bronx cheer George had ever heard, as the fire whistles started.

"But what can I do?"

"Good-by," said the dragon. "How do I know how you change a radio program? Isn't that a silly question? If I knew how, I'd do it. But you'd better find out how, or your friends, the realtors, will be ruined. Lemurians will help when you show us what to do, or else we'll all move and leave another ice age here!"

With that, he was gone. There was only a smoke pier, toward which fire fighters were crashing their way.

George walked back down to Aunt Jane's through a driving rain which at least, he thought, might put out the fires. He found his aunt had gone out to watch the engines, and the Yogi was alone in the parlor. He was excitedly stitching a pink robe for himself.

THE Yogi was very enthusiastic. "The master, Hoo Tannie, told me all about it," he said. "It's the opportunity of the ages. California hasn't had a new religion this year. We'll start one. I'll be the Grand High Adept and train a class of minor adepts. The general run of converts will be satisfied with visions of Paradise. The Lemurians will materialize as priests and prophets and produce visions."

"By Georgel!" said George, inspiration coming to him. "Everybody will attend if we make the pictures of Paradise like salubrious, sunny Santa Garras was before the unusual weather."

"Certainly," said the Yogi. "We'll advertise that we're building a rosy cloud in the ether to shield off rain and hail."

"Make me the treasurer," said George, "and we'll deliver the goods. We'll buy up all the radio time in San José, Santa Clara, Monterey and Santa Barbara, and play nothing but Haydn and Bach all day—and one hour of *The Pros- persons and their Progeny* for the dragon's wife and—of course—my commentary, because I've got to live too, or I'll be awfully discontented and my vibrations will spoil the Lemurians' control of the climate."

So the true occult faith of the Antediluvian Brotherhood was launched, and all the cities and towns—from Santa Clara to the coast—were filled with pink-robed preachers, most persuasive and handsome as archangels. The Yogi found it necessary to teach only inner circles, post-graduate adepts and other select groups, while the disguised Lemurians did the heavy proselytizing.

George skipped some of his broadcasts entirely, but that didn't matter, because no one could fire him. As money rolled in—each

Antediluvian prophet sending him, by express, a suitcase full every day—he bought up radio stations right and left. Out of loyalty to station KASH, he left its realtor owners in charge. They were thoroughly awed by George's rise in the business world.

There were small snags, of course, as were to be expected, George knew, in launching any modern enterprise.

The Antediluvian Brotherhood, which at first went almost unnoticed by the country at large, accustomed as it was to California cults, was finally protested—by the Rosicrucians, the Theosophists, Pyramid Science, the Vedantist Society and various Spiritualist churches, the New Thought people, the Voice and so on—as an interloper with a garbled gospel, most of it already known.

BUT, as George soon saw, this was nothing to worry about. The Antediluvians had an edge over all other true faiths, formerly well thought of by various Californians. None of the others could promise to restore the California climate!

Then there was the usual sex scandal to overcome. One of the Lemurians, carried away by his desire to please humanity, had materialized in a college sorority house as Tarzen of the Apes. The delighted sisterhood had hidden

him in the cellar when they heard the housemother coming, but she had found him, nevertheless, and there were threats of expulsion.

George settled that by ruling that, hereafter, no occult priest could practice except in the regular meeting halls of the Order, offering as an excuse that only there could money be collected.

Collections were usually by Lemurian whirlwinds, which whisked the bills out of the pockets of retired Middle Westerners while they were hunting for dimes to put in the plates being passed around. This discouraged church attendance after a time, but there was nothing like quick turnover and immediate profits, George always said.

There was also a delegation which wanted to know how housewives were going to keep up any enthusiasm for housework if they were denied the soul-gripping stories of family life that accompanied the advertisements for Rubaduba Suds and other kitchen helps. Another delegation, this time of retired businessmen, lamented the hours spent twiddling dials to get something besides classical music.

George settled both of those complaints sternly. He explained that to exorcise properly the most unusual weather, sinful men must practice penance—at least two hours every day listening to *The Propersons and their Progeny*

unless they really mortified the flesh by double that time listening to Haydn and Bach.

Meanwhile, the good work went on, and finally nothing at all was heard over the radio in Central California south of San Francisco, but Haydn, Bach, the Prospersons and Homestead Homilies.

Success itself and that old devil against which the Yogi had always warned, Insatiable Greed, brought the most severe test.

The unusual weather departed entirely. The salubrious, sunny Santa Garras climate reigned supreme. Trainloads of retired gentlemen, ready to become accounts in real estate offices, rolled in from Iowa and adjacent parts and there was a huge and lucrative traffic in acres and independence.

True, the Lemurians grew weary of being prophets and whirlwinds, and Aunt Jane wired repeatedly that they were being kept so busy they had no time to amuse her and her aged friends with dancing lights, on the hills back of Carmel.

EVENTUALLY, one after another of the Lemurians resigned his priesthood and had to be replaced by adepts from the Yogi's classes. With that, the Antediluvian Brotherhood began to lose appeal. Its membership dwindled and approached the vanishing point.

But George didn't care much, because by then he had the radio business sewed up, and had taken the trouble to keep ownership in small dummy companies instead of directly in the hands of the AB. There was still enough money in the treasury to run the stations for a while, and eventually manufacturers of radio sets would have to finance some kind of programs in order to sell their sets, George expected.

He had long ago discovered that, in his business, it was fatal to worry too much about the unexpected. Too unpredictable. George believed only in Babson and the Gallup Poll. Furthermore, he discovered that, by constant repetition, he was becoming rather fond of classical music and liked to keep the radio on, even while he worked in his rooms.

He was listening to KASH when a clique of its realtor owners, recently willing to let George make their programs, overreached themselves and yielded to the temptation to put on just one commercial.

George was working and listening with one ear, when he was startled to hear a chant of female voices coming from the radio:

"Choola, Choola, Choola oil

"In Rub-a-duba-duba Suds,

"Takes from washdays all the toil,

"Takes the dirt right out of our duds!"

That was as far as they got, for the radio then shouted, "Br-r-r-r-rth!"

Some people might call it static, but George recognized the dragon's magnificent and prolonged Bronx cheer!

Sudden darkness at noon—in midsummer—sent George rushing to the window, and he saw a mighty swirl of clouds, big black ones, all over the sky. A real Kansas whirlwind started tearing through the prunes and vines toward the heart of Santa Garras and radio station KASH. A veritable tornado.

Somebody in the studio came to his senses and as well as it could be heard through the outburst of most unusual weather, the sixty-seventh chapter, one hundred and fourth book of *The Prospersons and their Progeny* began in the middle, to be speedily replaced by a Bach chorale.

The weather cleared immediately.

"That'll learn 'em," George exulted and went back to work on his scripts.

SO, this modest history of George's experience with the Lemurians must end as it began, with George hunched over his typewriter cudgeling his brains for a scintillating sundry.

He looked at the blank page, and carefully wrote:

We have just lived through an unusual epoch, during which, by alliance with Lemurians, the California climate was saved . . . He sat and thought and added more hesitatingly:

To be sure, at the expense of some of the soap operas and rhymed commercials . . .

George stopped writing. Implausible! Likely to cause law suits! He had a momentary vision of the wrath and well-financed ingenuity of scores of alert and enterprising advertising services.

Just then a messenger boy came in with a telegram from Aunt Jane.

"Whoops!" read the telegram. "Forget about dancing lights. Yogi's friend, the Lemur dragon, in residence my back yard disguised as watch dog. Two burglars incinerated already. Have contracted to put on via Lemur dragon entire Fourth July fireworks display in hills back of Carmel. Dragon also useful for garbage disposal."

George smiled in sympathy with the old lady's pleasure.

Then an idea smote him. He hastily tore out the implausible screed from his typewriter, put in another sheet and began again:

We find, on due investigation, that the recent cyclone—so unusual in salubrious, sunny Santa Garras—escaped from the suitcase of a

homemaker recently arrived from the East. This gentleman had inadvertently enclosed the twister in his baggage in his reasonable and understandable haste to move into our midst. The cyclone was so enfeebled by its contact with our glorious climate that my Aunt Jane, who practices white magic and has a large dog as a familiar, was able to mount her broom and brush it back toward the Sierra Nevadas. In doing so, she accidentally swept up the 1562nd lost spur of Joaquin Murieta . . .

That was the old stuff! George was in the groove once more. Scintillating, a gentle jab at another part of the state, but nothing you can be sued for—*nothing implausible!*

Outside the sun was shining, and George whistled as he typed in tune to the radio, which was softly intoning a very relaxing cantata.

Ralph Spencer

METAL LORE

When it came to sleuthing, primitive Man was even sharper than James Fenimore Cooper's highly idealized buckskin hawkshaws. For example, lodestone, the naturally magnetized iron ore, seems to have been known universally before history's dawn. Its only use was magical, which, however, was based on observation and deduction. If lodestone attracted iron, it obviously could attract other things . . . such as reuniting lovers by pulling them together, drawing out insanity by moving a bit of it across the forehead and, in the 17th Century, was a drastic cure for rupture. The hapless patient was fed iron filings, while a poultice of crushed lodestone was fastened over the hernia, thus closing it. Lodestone was also so noted for storing up bravery that Alexander the Great issued it to his troops.

Lead, too, was known from earliest times, mainly for its magical properties. It never was useful against demons, witches and such, which need silver bullets, but a leaden arrow will kill the love of a youth. Other kinds may scare or knock him off, but only a leaden arrow carries the shamans' seal of approval. Styrians use lead under the tongue to cure toothache. In Sussex, England, an eggcup full of lead shot overcomes rising of the lungs, whatever that is. For the bite of a sea serpent, Galen, the famed 2nd Century physician, prescribed an application of lead and a slice of the guilty monster. No better remedy for the bite of a sea serpent has ever been discovered.

The Root and the Ring

The root of the trouble was the ring
. . . as long as you had it, you
couldn't get a single wrong number!

By WYMAN GUIN

$$W = (AZ + B) / (CZ + D)$$



DURING the depression, I didn't have a job, but I married a lovely girl who did—and she held onto it.

One day, she declared to me, "I want to have a baby."

"Well," I said, "don't act as if I am an obstacle to that ambition."

"As a matter of fact, dear, you are."

Until she announced this blunt business, I had been sitting quietly, thinking, and bothering no one. Now I asserted testily, "You have no proof yet."

Illustrated by KOSSIN

$AD+BC \neq 0$



She came over and bent and kissed me, and the way she did this made it obvious that I was misunderstanding her. She then drew back and looked in my eyes, her pretty auburn head tilted a little to one side, her chin raised a degree.

Quite calmly, and with supreme logic, she observed, "If I am going to have a baby, you will have to have a job."

That is how I was launched on the road to success. I didn't dream in those days that I could owe as much money as I do now.

In fact, as the happy years rolled along, bringing two fine children and the carefully geared stages of success, I began to realize that I could probably be even more successful and accumulate more and more property and that certainly I would have bigger and bigger bills to worry about and more and more social obligations.

I got to thinking about that.

Presently I could see that being any more successful than I was right then, when we were so happy, wasn't very practical. Finally, it came to me that if I got to be as successful as some of the fellows around me, I wouldn't have the time and insight to sit down and realize I didn't want to be that successful.

"This is it," I said to myself at the office one day. "This is where I get off the train. I will have to

find a way to stay moderately unsuccessful, the way I am now."

THERE seemed no better time than the present to go to work at it, so I scooped all the hot projects up off my desk and tossed them in a drawer to cool for a week or so. Then I sat there and thought about how I was going to tell my wife of the new plan.

I could see that wasn't going to be easy.

After a while, I was interrupted by my secretary coming in. She opened her mouth to speak and shut it. She stared at me, then at the clean desk-top. She started backing out of the office.

There was an unnatural rise in my voice as I asked her, "What is it?"

"It's all right. It can wait. I didn't realize you were busy thinking."

She closed the door with a lingering look of surprised respect.

What a hot new beginning I had made! A few more mistakes like that and I would be doomed to success. Just imagine, if the boss had come in and found me sitting there thinking . . .

Good Lord!—the words might have flashed through his mind—*this man has caliber. Just because he can't count beyond his fingers doesn't mean there isn't a place for him at the top.* That would be the one-way door. I would have

to join the Riverdale Club and worry annually about the station wagon set voting me back in. I would have to develop ulcers and take them to Mayo's at the end of each fiscal year.

I would be like the man who bought a second-hand yacht because the price was so low—and then discovered it burned 900 gallons of fuel a day, needed a crew of four, including a captain, and that the boat made his clothes and house and car and wife look shabby—all of which explained why the previous owner had practically given it away. In a situation like that, you can take your beating and get out, or run yourself into bankruptcy trying to look and act and live as though you could afford a yacht.

Success is a lot harder to work your way out of; the gains and losses aren't so easy to see. When we were married, for instance, we lived in a furnished cottage and took buses. Then came raises. They meant, successively, better houses in better sections of town, taxis, then a car, then a car for each of us, period furniture, modern furniture, individually designed custom-built furniture, a record collection, a hi-fi sound system, TV screens at least as big as our neighbors', a liquor cabinet, then a small bar, finally a big one with something for every taste, a freezer, washing machine, a whole laundry

room, a glassed-in stall shower, only one wasn't enough, which meant another bathroom, and so forth.

HERE, let me make it even clearer. You know that the national budget is mostly indebtedness from past wars—I understand we're still paying off on 1812, and didn't somebody put in a claim for stuff appropriated in the Revolutionary War, except that the interest was disallowed? Well, I was still paying off on things from several raises ago, only the interest damned well was *not* disallowed. Any more raises and we'd be living in the most luxurious penury, complete with swimming pool, anybody could imagine!

So I hastily got out the hot projects and scattered them about my desk. I would just have to go on working hard at them, taking good care never to get anywhere with them. I settled down safely behind the paper barrier and began to think about how I would tell my wife.

. I never got the chance. That night, while I was trying to get started, she gave me a wedding ring. I know that sounds strange, but it's like the problem of success—once you understand the facts, the whole thing becomes clear.

She gave me a wedding ring, even though we'd been married a

long while and had two children, because, as I've mentioned, I didn't have a job when she and I were married. That is the concrete but not the symbolic reason why I had borrowed the money for the ring I gave her. I borrowed five dollars, the most money he has ever loaned in his life, from the fellow she was engaged to. Then I took this lovely girl who had said she would marry me, and we picked out a depression-style wedding ring for that price.

My wife's old boy-friend had money to start with. He is a perfect example of the strength of character that comes with an atmosphere of moderate *wealth*. Even while we were in college, he

invested, little by little, in stuff that would make him really rich a few years later. After he was really rich, he put a fabulous engagement ring on this girl who just wasn't his type. She realized this and was unhappy about it.

So I borrowed five dollars from him to replace his ring and make her happy again.

My wife has never wanted any other ring. As a matter of principle, I didn't pay him back.

My wife always felt that I should have had a wedding ring, too. And the very day that I sat in my office, working out my plan to remain moderately unsuccessful, my wife was innocently arranging the time-payments on my wedding ring.



THAT evening, after our son and daughter had gone off to an early movie, we sat down to a quiet martini before dinner. I was bursting with my new plan, but I noticed that she kept looking at me sort of starry-eyed, and I saw the time wasn't ripe. She took my hands in hers and drew me down beside her on a couch.

"Darling, this is a little ceremony."

"Yes?" I asked uncomfortably, but with an appropriately eager smile.

She glanced obliquely at the coffee table, where there was a little box beside my martini. I picked it up, knowing it was a ring and that it meant a lot to her.

Practically all men wear rings—wedding rings, old school rings, lodge rings. Many buy and wear expensive rings of no special significance. I lost my high school class ring within a week of the time I got it, and I was surprised how strongly some of the fellows felt this to be a pretty shoddy piece of negligence. Even so, I have never cared much to wear a ring.

I decided, when I looked at this ring my wife was offering me, that it would be a small inconvenience if it made her a little happier. After she had slipped it on my finger, I kissed her gratefully. I admired its dull gold surfaces in silence for a while. Then I commented on how rich it looked. Finally I had a long

sip from my nearly dry martini.

My wife rested her auburn head on my shoulder and held my hand and looked at the ring. "It would have been silly to get you a real wedding ring after fifteen years," she explained. "We will understand, just between us, that it's a wedding ring, won't we?"

"That's right. It's a real wedding ring to us."

"Did you notice that the raised work down the center is a line of symbols?"

"No, I didn't realize that." I lifted my hand and scrutinized the ring. I started to take it off for a better look and noticed the hasty, partial motion of her hand, as though she wished to prevent me. I pretended I had only meant to turn the ring on my finger to review the whole line of symbols. Then I saw the band had an odd half-twist.

"The words are ancient Arabic," she supplied. "It's a very old ring. Nobody knows how old. When the jeweler showed me this, I fell in love with it. You do like it, too, don't you?"

"Of course I do, darling. It's a very handsome thing."

"I thought you seemed a little hesitant about it."

I looked shocked. "Oh, no—no, I like it very much. And you're wonderful to want to give it to me."

"Aren't you curious about what

the symbols mean, darling?"

"I was just going to ask. What do they mean?"

"You won't think it's a foolish notion?"

"Why should I think a thing like that? It isn't foolish, is it?"

"I don't think so."

"Well?"

"The jeweler wasn't sure, of course, but it says something about the person under the influence of this ring being favored above all men in the arts of numbers."

I GLANCED sharply at my wife's face. It looked completely innocent. Besides, she's not the practical-joker type, or any kind of joker, for that matter.

"Don't you think," I asked hesitantly, "that I'm a little inappropriate as the wearer? I can't even keep our checkbook balanced."

"Darling, the symbols are a beautiful design and we don't have to think about what they mean. I fell in love with the ring before I knew they meant anything. I wish now I hadn't told you."

"Forget it, dear," I said lightly. "I like it. I won't give the symbols another thought."

I have an old school friend in the anthropology department over at the university. The next day, I called on him, with the ring as heavy as a millstone on my finger.

I slipped it off and handed it to him. He poked it about in his

palm for a while and then said, "HMMMM!" Then, later, he said, "HMMMM! It's a moebius curve, isn't it?"

I didn't say anything, figuring he was the guy with the answers. He got a reading glass out of his desk and studied the ring more closely.

Finally he asked, "Where did you get this?"

"One of the jewelers downtown picked it up in Europe for my wife."

"I've never heard of anything like it and I know the Gujarat gold-work of India pretty well."

"I thought it was supposed to be Arabic."

"Oh, there's some Arabic here. For that matter, there's some Latin, too. But the original inscription is in Gujarati. Near as I can make it out, it says, 'The ring of magic that brought our minds the zero.' That makes sense, naturally, because the zero makes its appearance in Gujarat inscriptions of the 6th century A.D."

"What does the Arabic say?"

"Can't read it. You've read the Latin, I suppose?"

"Flunked it."

"Well, your ring was blessed by Sylvester II."

"Who's he?"

He indicated an encyclopedia in the bookshelves. I found the name and read for a while.

"Well?"

"He was formerly known as Gerbert and he was the first man in Europe to use an abacus with ciphers. The story that he stole it from an Arab in Spain is discredited." I put the book back. "Maybe it was this ring he filched?"

MY friend the anthropologist was certainly excited about it. The two of us pranced off to another room in the building, where a little bald-headed man studied the Arabic inscription under a glass.

He looked up and said, "Roughly, 'The magic ring of al-Khwarizmi, manipulator of emptiness.'"

I repeated, "Emptiness?"

"It's the Arabic word, *sifr*, from which our *cipher* is derived."

My friend the anthropologist said, "Al-Khwarizmi was the great Arabian mathematician who developed the decimal system. Do you realize this ring has followed the zero through three different cultures, from one revolution in mathematics to another?"

I asked the little bald-headed man, "Doesn't it say anything else in Arabic?"

He studied it again. "No, that's all the Arabic there is on it."

Somehow, I was doubly disturbed that the ring did not say what my wife had thought it said. *It actually said so much more.*

I took the ring from the little

bald-headed man and slipped it back on my finger. I said, "I'll think about it," when my friend the anthropologist suggested I bring it back another time for him to study.

One week later, I lost the ring.

It happened that the director's monthly report for our company had been circulated the day before I lost the ring and, ever since glancing through those figures, my mind had been working out some remarkably simple changes in our operation that would result in a much better profit picture. The ease with which I grasped and replanned the financial structure of the company frightened me. I had no intention of drifting into more raises and more debts. Not when my plans called, instead, for loving my wife, raising my kids and building an amateur telescope in the backyard of the only house east of the Mississippi that I cared to own.

I knew the damned ring fitted my finger loosely. I had even mentioned this a couple of times to my wife. She assured me it was a good fit, but on Saturday, while I was building a retaining wall around the big apple tree on the steep slope of our back yard, I lost it. With my attention on the building of the retaining wall and my mind working miracles with the company figures, I didn't notice that the ring was gone until late in the after-

noon. By then, I had already filled in the planting area behind the retaining wall and around the tree and planted ivy in the resulting bed.

I went into the house and explained carefully to my wife what had happened. For a moment, I thought she was going to cry.

I suggested the best thing would be to tear out the right side of the new retaining wall and start digging from there, because I was sure I had had the ring when I built up the left side.

My wife smiled, not too unkindly, and said, "No, darling. Let's forget it."

AS the summer passed, she *did* seem to forget. But my guilt converted the ivy bed about the apple tree into a taboo place. When it came time to help the children pick the apples, I hated to walk under the tree. I watched the seared leaves tumble down the hill like arid supplicants and cling, trembling, in the ivy.

The frost came and then the snow and, as my love's token froze in ice, I feared she might one day see me out there, hacking at the iron earth with the pick-ax. If that day came, the terrible thing about it would be the ease with which I might find it. Some fugitive memory told me just where the ring lay—at the root of the apple tree.

The Christmas season came and we began to eat the apples we had picked.

Two nights before Christmas, we were down on the floor in front of the fireplace, the whole family, cutting stars and paper chains for the tree. My wife had sliced apples for us to eat while we worked. Outside, there was a raging blizzard and I had boomed up a birch fire on the grate. It occurred to me that we were a picture of the American family in a consumer-goods ad, it being impossible to tell, from all this happiness, how much we owed.

I suppose you could say that cutting the strips of paper for the tree reminded me of cutting a moebius curve, though I had never cut one before. I slit a strip of green paper about three feet long and two inches wide, and I said, "Hey, you guys, look at this trick."

I held the paper out in front of me. "You take one end in your left hand, with the thumb uppermost. The other end you take in your right hand, with the thumb down. Turn the fingers of the right hand down and in; like this, until they point to your body, and you've put a half-twist in the strip of paper. Now bring the left hand over without twisting and join the ends for gluing."

I proceeded to glue the ends.

My wife asked, "Do you have to interrupt us for that?"

"Now, now—this is a magic ring, because it has a half-twist in it. You see, you poke a scissor through the strip, like this, and start to slit it lengthwise and . . ."

Our daughter was ten and inclined to be a little impenetrable. But at this point, her face brightened and she said, "Oh, I see. That's clever. It has only one edge and one side."

I stared at her for a moment. "Yes. But you interrupted rather rudely."

"I'm sorry, Daddy."

"Now, you see, you keep cutting down the center of the strip . . ."

"Mother interrupted before," she insisted on reminding me.

"I forgive you both. You keep cutting down the center of the strip and—how many rings do you think you'll have when you're finished?"

"One," the boy stated. He was thirteen and inclined to make up his mind before he knew the facts.

"You're only guessing," I accused, approaching the end of the cut. "Look at the double ring hanging here below the scissors. Doesn't it seem to you I'll end up with two rings?"

"No. You'll end up with one."

I COMPLETED the cut. "Well, of course, you're right. It makes only one ring." I held up the ring. Everyone was looking at me.

My wife gave me a bitter-sweet smile.

My daughter returned without a word to the red-and-green paper chain she had been working on before I'd interrupted.

"That was a moebius curve," I explained. "It's a remarkable figure in geometry. Many illustrious mathematicians have been mystified by it."

"Anyone can see," my son said casually, "that it splits into one ring." His voice shifted to a shocking treble on the word "splits"—which was all that kept me from boxing his ears.

I got up and went into the kitchen and mixed myself a highball. Reluctantly, I went back to the living room and sat down with them again.

My wife glanced at my drink and then back to her work. "We'll need about ten feet more of that chain," she said to the girl.

The burning around my ears spread over my whole scalp. Such a smart damned family. Knew everything and didn't know anything. I would have just liked to stun them into a gibbering shock with the dynamic topology of space-time.

The wind slammed sleet into the storm-windows in great *whooshes* that were made up of a million icy clicks. My family planned the decoration of the tree while they worked.

Suddenly, I had hold of an enormous idea. It made the hair at

the back of my neck stir. From burning with shame, I felt my face abruptly cool and go pale. There in my mind, as clearly and as illusively as the dancing flames on the grate, rose a nameless and intricate pattern.

I grabbed a piece of the green Christmas paper and a pencil and started drawing. If a plane were cut so—and so—the simple matter of a moebius curve would become . . .

Drawing rapidly, I felt my wife's eyes on me and the children looking up and becoming silent. By the time I had finished marking out the cuts and indicating the edges to be glued, my growing self-consciousness had obliterated the geometrical structure in my mind. The last lines I drew on the paper from my memory of what would *have* to be done. They no longer made sense to *me*.

Stubbornness buoyed me and I went to work with outward calm, cutting the paper and folding and gluing it the way I had marked. A hurried glance disclosed my son resting his chin in his hand and staring at me. My daughter's agate-green eyes and her round face were making an attempt to mimic one of her mother's moments of tolerant suspicion. I don't know what my wife's expression was like—I didn't dare look at her.

The wind outside was howling up a crescendo as I finished glu-

ing the thing together and peered into its surfaces at a point that beckoned from infinity. If you pulled here with one hand, and here with the other, it began to fold in on itself with the complicated movements of an interdependent system. It was going to do something incredible if I stretched it any more.

It disappeared, completely and instantly, when I pulled.

MY hands fell apart and there was nothing there. I was looking into three utterly astonished faces. The firelight danced like liquid gold on their wide eyes. Then there were squeals of laughter and the kids were saying, "Daddy, do it again!" "Do it again, Dad!"

My wife just sat there looking at me and a strange smile had come over her face. After a while, she got up from the floor and came over and knelt beside me. She kissed me first and then, close to my ear, she whispered, "Darling, I'm sorry we made you feel *that* badly. You didn't have to outdo yourself."

When she drew back, my daughter put her arms around me and hugged me tightly. "You're the most marvelous daddy in the world. Do it again, *please!*"

I looked into her proud face for a long moment. "I can't," I said slowly, and turned to my wife.

"The directions were on the piece of paper."

"But, darling," my wife laughed, "surely you can remember how you did it."

I stared into the fire. "No, I haven't any idea."

My boy said, "Well, for the love of Mike!"

There was a long silence. Then my wife sighed. "That's a shame. It would have made a wonderful trick for parties. Come, children—let's get ready for bed."

I sat there for a while. Finally I got up and said, "Well, I'm pretty tired. I guess I'll go to bed, too."

They were discussing the time tomorrow that they would decorate the tree and they didn't hear me.

From where I lay in bed, a little later, I could occasionally see the limbs of the apple tree, ghostly in the fallow light from the street. The tree writhed violently in the storm like a live thing struggling up out of the frozen ivy. A wedding ring that was a moebius curve was buried there, a ring with a fantastic history that carried for me an irrational threat of unwanted eminence.

That structure I had built out of the Christmas paper . . . What unknown geometry had I tapped? It was an absurd notion that the ring had magic powers, let alone that it could contaminate the roots and fruit of the tree. Yet where

else had that structure come from?

The threat from the ring had ballooned far beyond mere financial success. The first thing I knew, I would be writing world-shaking formulas like $E = mc^2$. Then some jockey would use my figures to power space flights. Then I would be directly responsible for the ugly interplanetary incidents that would follow, when tourists started throwing coke bottles and cigar butts in the canals of Mars. I would get the Nobel Peace Prize for making an interplanetary war possible.

Then an electrifying realization stiffened my back. Good Lord, the *whole family* was eating those apples!

PRESENTLY, my wife entered from her dressing room and got into her bed. I wanted very much to tell her about the threat to us all, but then, suddenly, the notion of a magic ring and contaminated apples seemed too absurd to talk about.

After a while in the dark, I said, "Darling, don't you think we're eating too many apples lately, just because we have so many of them? I don't think they're very good apples anyway."

"Oh, are you awake? I didn't come to kiss you because I thought you were asleep. They're perfectly good apples. We've eaten them for years."

"They keep me awake," I said honestly. "I thought the children were looking a little washed out."

"Darling, that's a silly notion. The children have a balanced diet. You won't mind if I *don't* come to kiss you, will you. I've got cream all over my face."

On New Year's Eve, she prepared an apple pie and it seemed ridiculous not to enjoy it.

When the next director's report came to my desk, I got to thinking again about how easily our corporate structure could be reorganized to provide a much more profitable operation. I was sitting at my desk, without one hot project before me, nothing but the report and a pad of paper where I had jotted down a few crucial calculations.

Then, of course, our president walked in.

Well, he had caught me red-handed in *thought*, so I would probably get a raise anyway. I sincerely liked the man and it seemed definitely unfair for me to sit there, a newly realized Einstein of the business world, and not tell him what I had learned. This was so big that I would be risking promotion to the board if I didn't play it down.

I explained it to him as off-handedly as I could and claimed I got a lot of the ideas from fellows around the office. I guess that was a mistake. The way he glanced

at me, both of us knew nobody around that office had ideas like this. I tried to keep the development of the ideas from getting exciting, but I could hear the sparks crackling in his tycoonery.

When I walked into the living room that evening, my wife was reading the evening paper.

She looked up briefly. "Hello, darling. Did you have an interesting day?"

AFTER losing the ring, I had never gotten around to telling her about my plan to stay unsuccessful. Till then, I had just quietly pursued the plan in my own way and today had been a necessary break in procedure, because I couldn't be dishonest with my boss. Now I found that, after twenty years of coming home to Mom and then fifteen years of coming home to my wife, it was impossible not to feel proud when I brought home the best report card, the biggest fish, an enemy's scalp or a raise.

"I had a wonderful day," I beamed.

"I did, too. Last week, I was listening to the women at the club talk about their husband's investments and I got to thinking I ought to know more about stocks. This morning, I took some books out of the library—" she indicated a formidable pile to the right of her chair—"and, dear, it's a fascinating

subject. I think I'm going to be very good at it."

"Good at what?"

"Investing. I have a thousand dollars saved, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"Oh, yes. I've always felt a wife should keep a nest egg. I feel now, since this is such an easy subject for me, that I ought to put some money to work for us."

"I thought we might have some martinis and celebrate a little."

"Not tonight, dear. You know how sleepy I get afterward and I want to get in some reading tonight." She indicated the formidable pile again.

"Oh."

"What was your news?"

"I got a raise of two thousand a year."

She lowered the paper to her lap. "Really, darling, I think that's wonderful. You've waited a long time for it, haven't you?"

"Well, not *that* long."

"I think it's wonderful, *however* long you've waited."

I STOOD there for a while, and then I said, "What are we having for dinner?"

"I fixed a cold buffet, because the children and I didn't care to eat right away. Each of us can eat when he wants to. You don't mind, do you?"

"No, that's all right. I think I'll eat now."

"Why don't you, dear? Dear?"

"Yes?"

"Aren't you going to kiss me?"

I kissed her and she went back to her stock quotations.

I had thought the boy might be interested in eating, which he usually was, but when I entered his room, I saw better. He had a bunch of "art-photo" and "girlie" magazines scattered across his desk. The blonde nude he had before him hit me right in the midriff, but he sat there, calm as a cucumber, measuring the distance from her navel to her chin with calipers.

He said, "Oh, hi, Dad."

I said, "Hello. How's the schoolwork going?"

"Oh, this isn't schoolwork."

I smiled. "I only said it for a joke."

There was a silence while he entered, on three different tabular sheets beside him, the delicate measurement he had just made.

"What on earth are you doing?" I asked at last.

He delayed answering while he spanned an even more intimate distance on the topology of the blonde. "Oh, just taking a healthy interest in girls, I guess you might say." His sparsely whiskered bass skidded with a shriek on the word "girls."

I looked around his desk at the busty, laughing array and felt the dull thud of middle age. "What has

led you to believe," I asked carefully, "that such precise measurement of these undefended citadels will be necessary?"

"It isn't necessary to measure most of them. Most of them aren't any good."

I said to myself, "None of them are any good, my boy," and I grinned back knowingly at a sloe-eyed brunette. Aloud I asked, "What makes some of them good to measure?"

"Recognize any of the books in this picture?"

THE page with the blonde on it was titled, *A Librarian's Day Off*. The blonde, wearing only a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, was cuddled up in a pile of books. She was good-naturedly sharing in the huge joke.

"Well, it's quite a library."

"That one there is in your library." He indicated an illustrated edition of Anatole France's *Thais*. "It measures nine and five-eighths inches from top to bottom and gives me a reference against which to convert the measurements of the girl."

"I see."

He indicated other pictures. "I found this beach ball at the sport-goods store and over here are standard boxing gloves. That cock-tail glass looks a little oversized, doesn't it?"

I allowed as how it did.

"It isn't, though. It's just that she's a very small girl. I calculate she stands a little under four feet eleven inches."

This whole business was beginning to depress me and I was on the verge of protesting his mechanized approach, when he added an afterthought, "She's about six inches shorter than I am."

Here, at last, was a healthy sign. The boy did identify himself in a rôle, even if it was only one of comparative height. Well, a father ought to be more than a close friend. In a case like this, he ought to guide the child's interest toward more realistic goals.

I indicated a languidly sprawling creature and remarked with moderate enthusiasm, "This one's a lulu, isn't she?"

"What? Oh! Well, she's an ectomorphic mesomorph with a three in endomorphy."

Then I saw that he had pulled several texts from my library and among them were two of W. H. Sheldon's books on body types.

"You know," he explained, "that's her somatotype."

"You're sure it isn't her tomato-type?"

He tossed aside his calipers and assumed a man-to-man position in his chair. "You see, Dad, the female figure is much more interesting to me than the male, because it's a structural compromise between two functions. It's a second-

rate muscular engine, because of its reproductive functions, but it's interesting how the compromise is worked out structurally in various female figures."

I looked at this boy of mine and I said to myself, "Here ends a proud line that sprang from the magnificent lust of a Viking who surprised a barbaric maid on Shannon's shore."

HE didn't seem to worry about himself at all. "If I can find enough pictures containing a quantitative reference," he said, "I hope to establish a statistical ideal."

"And then you'll start looking for her?"

"Well, sure."

Not without some trepidation, I asked, "How are you going to be sure you've located a real-life ideal?"

He thought about that for a while. "I guess there'll be only one way to be sure."

I nodded. "Rope her, throw her to the floor and get out your calipers."

"I don't think it will come to that. Do you?"

I looked at my watch. "I thought you might like to eat with me. There's a cold buffet in the dining room."

He came back from his contemplation of the roping trick. "Oh, I couldn't leave this right now. I have three more pictures to

measure and tabulate."

Some healthy interest in girls *he* had.

I went out into the dining room. The buffet was neatly laid out and the place was very quiet. I stood around a bit and looked at the food. Then I walked back to my daughter's room.

"Hi, Daddy."

"Hello," I said. "I thought you might like to eat now."

"Oh, do I *have* to, Daddy? I was just working on some figures."

"By God!" I thought. "This is too much!" Aloud I asked sternly, "What kind of figures?"

"Like this." She held up sheets of drawing paper from her desk. She had numerals drawn on them in all manner of styles and esoteric designs. "It's as much fun as arithmetic. Daddy, did you know that I'm getting one hundred in arithmetic every day now and Teacher says I'm a budding genius?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"But this is very interesting, too. Daddy, do you think the signs for the numbers mean anything else?"

"Not that I know of. Of course, the figure one and the word I are pretty much the same."


"Do you think the other signs were made up from the one and zero?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, you *can* make them up that way by using zeros and half-

zeros, and then they look like this." She held up a sheet and then put it down and drew lines, relating the numerals in pairs. "See how they are married?"

12 345 67890



"Well," I said, "that really *is* interesting."

"See, Daddy, if you lifted the two off the page and flipped it over, it would be a five. All you have to do is slide the six around on the page and it's a nine. Of course, the three is half of the eight, isn't it?"

"It is at that."

"The only one that disappoints me is the seven. It should be like the four, only it isn't. Not even a little."

I SAID contemplatively, "Since you're this deeply into the problem, I'll let you in on something. In Europe, people generally write the seven like this." I drew the figure on a piece of paper.

7

"Oh, Daddy! Is that really true?"

"I won't swear to the accuracy of my drawing," I hedged, "but they really do put a cross-bar on the seven."

"Look how it fits into the design!" she exclaimed, delighted.

"Very neatly," I confessed. "A tilted mirror-image of the four. I'll admit I never thought of tying the numbers together like this, but now that you've got it, what have you got?"

"Daddy, do you think the line of numbers connected this way is a message to us?"

"Absolutely. To me, it says quite clearly, 'Man does not live by figures alone.'" I heard my stomach growl and I asked again hesitantly, "Are you sure you wouldn't like to eat with me?"

"Oh, Daddy, I *couldn't*! This is too exciting."

Sometimes it seems to me that the quality of a lot of the prepared foods sold in this country rates a prison sentence. The manufacturers take all the nutrition out of wheat flour and it bakes up into a sandwich loaf that has a little texture only because it is pre-sliced and dried out. It's a laugh, what they call "cold-cuts" — sawdust pasted together with waste collagen. God knows what's in those sandwich spreads, but they can throw a man's digestion out of whack faster than a double dose of castor oil.

When I had finished my sandwich and a glass of warm milk, I went back to the buffet and looked around. There was half a cold apple pie there and when I went to pick it up, I dropped it on the floor. I was bending down to pick

up the plate when I realized my wife was standing in the door.

She asked quietly, "Why did you do that?"

"Isn't the correct word 'how'?"

We looked at each other across the apple pie for a time and then my wife walked slowly past me to the window. I stood over the spilled pie, feeling foolish about not picking it up, but unable to take my eyes off my wife. She stood at the window and stared down across the snowy lawn at the apple tree.

Presently, she said without turning, "Perhaps there is a fate that follows the loss of a magic wedding ring. Do you believe this is happening to us?"

"It definitely is happening to all of us," I said bluntly. "I am not going to eat any more apples."

Her fine figure leaned back against the casing and her head relaxed toward the cold pane. Her bosom rose and fell tranquilly, without excitement. After a while, she declared, "I will continue to eat apples and prepare them for the children."

I WENT over to the window and took her hands in mine and turned her to me. I told her I wanted to avoid getting any more successful and why I felt that way.

"You don't really want more money," I concluded. "This foolishness about stocks just came

about because of that wedding ring."

She chose to misinterpret what I had said. "There is nothing foolish about wedding rings," she said hotly, "except when people violate or lose them."

She drew away from me and stood very straight. "I'm going to make so much money, the Federal Reserve Bank will start sending us envoys."

When I got home the next evening, there was a robin's-egg-blue Cadillac parked in the drive. The gleaming hood was flanked by prodigious chrome trumpets. The upholstery was cream leather. About the only thing it lacked was a squirrel's plume on the buggy-whip aerial.

I went into the living room and there was my wife's old boy friend sitting in my favorite chair. I saw that he had lost quite a bit of hair, which probably explained the college-boy decorations on his Cadillac.

He stirred hugely in Scottish tweed and rose, extending a hand.

I said, "Well, the dim past returns in big live chunks, doesn't it?"

"It hasn't been as long ago as all that." He said this as if he would brook no further analysis on the point.

"It's been every bit as long ago as all that. Fifteen long years, to be exact."

His jaw jutted out against the fact.

I added, "That's the better part of a man's life."

My wife breezed in with a tray and a pitcher of martinis. "How nice to see you two getting reacquainted."

I lifted a glass off the tray as she went by me toward him. "We hardly recognized each other," I said wryly.

"Darling, we'll have to explain the occasion to you."

"Oh, I'm not going to insist on it."

"We've been together all day and we've formed a loose association."

I could only goggle silently at her.

"Business," he supplied. "Business association." He has always had a sense of humor like a stretch of Mohave Desert.

"He says I have a remarkable eye for figures."

"So does he," I insinuated.

MY wife was disgusted. "Now you stop that. You are not going to spoil our chance to make millions."

He swallowed his anger and said, "Your wife has an almost magical grasp of the market. I have promised to pay her a thousand dollars a week as a consultant. This arrangement will give me the advantage of her insight and

afford her money for her own investments."

"I don't like it," I stated. "It's out."

"But, darling, we can have all the things we want."

I looked at her for a long time. "What is it we want?"

"Well . . ."

"Do we want a yacht?"

"Of course not, dear."

"Do we need a third car?"

"Darling, please!"

"Do you want a mink coat?"

She declared levelly, "Yes, I do."

"Do you want some house-help?"

"Certainly."

"All right," I said. "You don't have to upset the national economy, after all. I'll get you the mink coat and a maid, and you call off this Hettie Green act."

My wife's old boy friend stuck his nose in solicitously. "I was thinking," he offered smoothly, "of putting you up for the Riverdale Club. And the children—they should be going to the proper schools. I can arrange to get them entered."

I thought about the Riverdale Club—and about the kids becoming nasty little prep-school snobs. I thought of the man who bought the second-hand yacht.

I walked over to him and smiled. "I owe you something."

He dodged back. Then he saw



me pull the five dollars from my pocket and he recovered. "What's this for?"

"I borrowed it from you for my wedding ring."

He took it sullenly and stuffed it into his pocket.

"But I also owe you the interest," I added, and I cracked him a dilly under his second chin.

He collapsed all over the carpet and our wide-eyed kids seemed to appear from the woodwork.

The boy said, "Gee, Dad, you really lifted him up and laid him down!"

"Is he dead?" the girl asked, as if it were the second act in a TV show.

"My God, darling!" My wife said this as though she had found a dead horse in her living room. "What will we *do* with him?"

"Kids," I said softly, "you had better go on back to your rooms."

THEY went reluctantly. I took the flowers from a bowl on the mantle and dumped the bowl in his face. He began to splutter.

I left them alone to dissolve their "association." Out in the back hall, I put on a windbreaker and cap, I went down to the basement and carried the last bushel of apples out and dumped them in the garbage. I grinned down the lawn at the apple tree and went to the garage and got out the ax. I was sitting at the bench, honing it,

when I heard the Cadillac start out of the drive.

Presently, my wife stepped through the door into the garage.

"Darling, you *wouldn't!*"

"Huh?" I asked vacantly, then saw her staring at the ax. "I love you. Besides, there are the children to think of—I can't manage them by myself."

"Silly, I didn't mean that. I mean I know what you're planning."

"In that case, I must say I *will*."

"I won't let you. You have your choice of digging up that ring and wearing it the rest of your life, or living here with a family of apple eaters. Do you just resent wearing a ring because it makes you feel tied down?"

My wife can say the damndest things. "Of course not."

"Don't you think that, whatever peculiarities there are about the ring I gave you, it was given in good faith?"

"Certainly I do."

"If it *is* a magic ring and fate has brought it down through history to you, don't you think you're trying to duck a pretty serious responsibility?"

I put down the ax and held up my hands. "All right, let's cut out the cross-examination."

She brought her beautiful body forward and stood over me. Her lovely head, which was still auburn, was tilted slightly to one

side. Looking up into her exploring eyes, and thinking of what she had just said, I suddenly thought of Gerbert, who had quietly introduced the cipher into pre-Renaissance Europe. There *were* ways to use that ring.

QUITE calmly and with supreme logic, she observed, "You know, you have assumed the responsibility of raising a couple of children. Don't you think you owe it to them to leave them the best possible world?"

I rose slowly and went over and collected the pick-ax and shovel. Then I grinned at her and went out of the garage and down the lawn toward the apple tree.

That is how I was relaunched on the road to success. I didn't

dream then that you can be as quiet and unseen about it as I am now. I don't owe a cent—in fact, I own all sorts of businesses and property, through proxies, of course—yet I'll bet you've never heard of me. Maybe you've noticed I haven't told you my name or anybody else's in this account. That's one way it's done.

And I did rediscover the figure that vanished from my hands when I pulled. That was my first discovery.

There are lots more, but they won't be known for a long while.

Like the discovery of the zero, you see.

Wyman Guin

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